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fantastic
SCIENCE FICTION

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6 NEW STORIES

Including a full-length fantasy novel, Part I (see Back Cover): BOOK REVIEW/ "URSHURAK," by the Brothers Hildebrandt and Jerry Nichols

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IN THIS ISSUE

ALONG WITH an intriguing selection of new stories, departments and features, this issue of *Fantastic* presents the first half of a new fantasy novel, *The White Isle,* penned by one of the more prolific and able young writers we have come in contact with this year: Darrell Schweitzer. Drawing inspiration from medieval romance and Japanese myth, the author has created his own mythology and tells us, "It's extremely fatalistic, based on the principle of Devine Desertion, and probably wouldn't make a good basis for a popular religion. (Founders of cults please take note). It seems to me that the fantasy writer's chief task is to give his story mythological depth, to explain how the universe works in some way which makes the same kind of emotional sense the genuine classic myths did. Genuine mythologies are metaphors for existence, and invented ones create metaphors in the same sense that poetry does." Part II of *The White Isle* will appear in our July issue, and the novel in its entirety will be forthcoming from Borgo Press.

Our other fiction runs the gamut from humor to horror as presented by both new and established authors—a tradition we intend to keep on exploring. If we can bring exciting new talent to public attention, surely everyone will benefit.

Positive reader feedback has encouraged the addition of new articles and features and in this issue a game review column—*Games Fen Will Play* by Greg Costikyan. The writer's initial piece concerns fantasy role-playing games, where you enter a gamemaster-fabricated universe in the role of a character you create for yourself, and use your wits to attain fame or fortune within the framework of rules in that particular theater of existence; a fascinating situation which works much better in some games than in others, as you will read.

Artists in this issue besides the masterful Brothers Hildebrandt, whose painting from *Urshurak* graces our front cover (see our book review in *Readerscope)* include Gary Freeman with beautiful interior and back cover illustrations for *The White Isle,* and Steve Fabian with Part IV of *Daemon,* a sword and sorcery feature created for the pages of *Fantastic.*

Read on and enjoy.

Arthur Bernhard, Publisher

Alan Bernhard, Associate Publisher

Sol Cohen, Publisher Emeritus

Elinor Mavor, Editorial & Art Director

Omar Gohagen, Editor

Britton Bloom, Anna Gail, Editorial Assistants

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fantastic SCIENCE FICTION

April, 1980

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Illustration by the Brothers Hildebrandt from "Urshurak," reproduced with permission of Bantam Books, Inc.

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Kudos & Kicks from Out There

Fantastic is shaping up excitingly. The idea of having the editor acknowledging his thinking on why the stories were good enough to publish should inspire feedback. But put a stop to all those questions—we are not in your classroom. We read your magazine largely for entertainment, and also doubtlessly for fascinating ideas that SF develops.

Top honors go to Dellinger for *The Cliffhanger Sound*. It was so fast paced the reader doesn't get around to questioning the believability of the phenomena or its lack of explanation until the story is over. Nostalgia fun was not so explicit as in Schweitzer's *Never Argue With Antique Dealers*, which was jeweled and polished but didn't have so much depth. Depth was there in the formulation and presentation of *Muruyn the Magnificent* by Fark, a literary performance that wins him second best tale this issue. I thought I was reading *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine* when I finished Moore's *Alpha Centauri A Nine*—even his (Isaac's) excessive similar entries weren't this pun-derful. Just don't overdo it as often as his magazine does.

So where does that leave the also-ran authors? Not too far behind! The whole issue was satisfying. Bradbury on TV was covered in convincing depth, and we read this aloud in our club meeting discussion on SF filmings at our most recent meeting. I am not reconciled yet to your surreal cover artwork. It is too different and pastel to be right. The back cover story is beginning to amount to something, even though your intentions seem to be to keep this spot for minor humor. Other than that, Maurer's *Frozen Star* was the low point of this issue; the ending was weakly unrealistic. Something unusual was to be expected, but what we got was not adequately built up, developed and played to. Griffin's *Pawn Shop Camera* is next up the ladder. The style and treatment hold it back. Short though it was, Brown's *Person to Person* was better, a fine idea but failing to explain the bitter facts of earning living expenses. I can just see them down at the local unemployment insurance office in turmoil. Maybe that's a sign of insecurity—but when I see the increases in the price of SF, not to mention gasoline and winter heating expenses, I think the statistics of inflation is a pack of lies! Less than ten percent a year? Not in the last six years; no way!

Walter A. Coslet
Helena, Montana Science Fiction Club

The October issue of *Fantastic SF* is great. I like the new features currently running plus the new features recommended--especially the SF film column, the fandom column and the SF/Fact column.

However, even with these successes I have some complaints about the magazine. First, it is too infrequently published; how can you expect us to wait three months for those wonderful copies of *Fantastic*. Second, it's too small. The "giant" 162-page issues of the late 1960s would be more appropriate.

I also must speak out on an issue important to all SF lovers; that is the decline of SF magazines. Over the last twenty years,

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SF magazines have gone from being the major source of SF to an insignificant source of SF and fantasy in America. Even the leading SF magazine in the world, Analog (a magazine whose format I don't like), is struggling in this type of market. While SF books boom (over 1,000 books published in 1979 and two bestsellers, *Lucifer's Hammer* and *The White Dragon),* the magazines die. In fact, only three prozines publish monthly, Analog, F & SF, and IASFM, and only 56 issues of prozines are published each year. The magazines (including *Fantastic* and your sister magazine, *Amazing),* could be leaders in attracting new readers by having your magazines displayed in book stores, where most SF fans are. Another possibility is having a larger magazine (maybe pulp size, to go with the new old look) to gain more display space, because at my newsstand the SF magazines are stacked at the bottom, behind other magazines.

In closing, keep up the good work, especially the Fabian features and the good science fiction by new authors and established stars.

Karl T. Heck
East Syracuse, N.Y.

Thanks for your comments. All of your suggestions have been or are under consideration for the future. We are all for the return of the magazine as a source of good SF reading.

Everywhere I look (well, not literally), I see reviews parising John Varley's *The Persistence of Vision,* and I was sorry you folks did likewise. Surely this story is overlong, retrograde, repetitions and masochistic? The sex scenes, which read like teenage fantasies, are alone enough to make this story hard to take seriously. And does anyone *really* believe that the '60s and '70s brand of "total intimacy" is the way to happiness? Maybe a few ex-hippies and other assorted pain-freaks . . .

It's beyond me how this story won the Nebula. My faith in the judgement of those who voted is badly shaken, to say the least.

Otherwise, I think you're doing a *Fantastic* job with the magazines—even if you have returned two of my stories! And thank you for reprinting "The Runaway Skyscraper"! I've been wanting to read it for a long time.

Fred H. Tolman
Ossining, N.Y.

FAN FARE

by James J. J. Wilson

SOMEONE ONCE said that a writer must have a tremendous ego in order to think that anyone will be interested in what he has to say. This may be one explanation for the existence of so many awards, especially in the SF field.

SF awards have existed practically as long as the field has in the form of polls taken by fans in order to determine the most popular story, artist, editor, etc. The first major award in the field was not originated until 1951, however. This was the International Fantasy Award which, unfortunately, only lasted until 1957. It consisted only of two awards: fiction and non-fiction. The awards were decided by a panel of judges.

Part of the demise of the International Fantasy Award was due to the start of the Science Fiction Achievement Award in 1953. This award, better known as the Hugo (named after Hugo Gernsback), has been awarded annually at the World

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Science Fiction Convention since 1955. The Hugo is awarded in ten different categories consisting of awards for fiction, Best Editor, Artist, Fan Writer, etc. This year there will also be an as yet undetermined Special Hugo Award category.

Anyone who wishes to become a member of the annual World Science Fiction Convention is entitled to vote for the Hugo which makes it more a popularity contest than anything else. Members also vote on two other awards which aren't, as is the Hugo, sanctioned by the World Science Fiction Society. One is the Gandalf Award, sponsored by fantasy author and editor Lin Carter. This award is given primarily for fiction in the fantasy field and is totally redundant due to the fact that the Hugo encompasses *both* fantasy and science fiction. The other is the John W. Campbell award for the best new writer. This award is sponsored by *Analog* magazine. This award may be a good idea in theory but in practice it is made less meaningful by the fact that most of the people who vote on the awards are not familiar with most of the new writers. This is a good example of the major drawback of an award which anyone can vote on. Further discussion on this award can be found in a column by Ted White, former editor of this magazine, in *Thrust* #13 (available from 11919 Barrel Cooper Court, Reston, VA 22091).

This brings us to 1965 and the Nebula award. This is voted on by the Science Fiction Writers of America and is awarded only to works of fiction. Many consider this award as important, if not more so, as the Hugo. It too, however, has several major drawbacks such as the situation which arises when one is asked to vote for or against someone who may be a friend or competitor.

The award on the opposite end of the spectrum from the Hugo is the World Fantasy Award, also known as the Howard (named after H.P. Lovecraft), which is awarded in similar categories as the Hugo. Awarded at the annual World Fantasy Convention, it is decided solely by a panel of judges.

It is very hard to say whether the "popular vote" or the "panel of judges" system is better. I would tend to favor the latter if a favorable system for finding qualified judges could be found.

There is a vast number of other awards given by various groups and organizations but the Hugo, Nebula and Howard are, by far, the most influential and widely accepted. The book, *The History of the Hugo, Nebula, and International Fantasy Awards* by Donald Franson and Howard De Vore is a listing of all the nominees and winners of those awards from their creation up through 1978. It is available from Mr. De Vore for $3.50 at 4705 Weddel, Dearborn, MI 48125. It is a worthy addition to any SF reference library.

The only major award which YOU, the average fan, can vote for is the Hugo. In order to do this you must be a member of the World Science Fiction Convention. Memberships in this year's convention, Noreascon Two, which will be held in Boston over Labor Day weekend, are available from Box 46, M.I.T. Station, Cambridge, MA 02139. Attending memberships are $30.00 and supporting memberships, which entitle you to vote for the awards, are $8.00. Prices will probably be raised after July first.

Membership entitles you to vote not only for the Hugos but also for the John W. Campbell Award, the Gandalf Awards, and the site selection for the 1982 convention. If you plan on voting this year I urge you to vote for Chicago. More information on all the bidding committees is available from Noreascon Two or you can become a pre-supporting member in the "Chicago in '82" convention for a donation of $1.00 or more sent to Chicon IV at P.O. Box A3120 in Chicago, IL 60690.

A future installment of this column will be devoted to SF conventions.

Remember, any and all questions or comments sent to me c/o the editor or at P.O. Box 74, Hinsdale, IL 60521, will be deeply appreciated. ■

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READERSCOPE

BOOK REVIEWS

by Tom Staicar

Urshurak (Created by the Brothers Hildebrandt and Jerry Nichols, Bantam trade paperback, $9.95; also Book of the Month Club and Quality Paperback Book Club).

Urshurak is a major fantasy event which is certain to become one of the most talked about books in the field. Several million books, calendars and posters have been adorned with the incomparable art of the Brothers Hildebrandt, including a famous *Star Wars* poster and everybody's favorite Tolkien illustrations. This book is the first one created by the artists, along with Jerry Nichols, to suit their own original concepts. Starting with over 1,000 drawings done in Magic Marker, the creation of the coordinated text manuscript and illustrations took two years, with a film and book combination as the ultimate goal. The book part of the project is now available, published by Bantam Books after a bidding battle for publishing rights to this important work.

Tim and Greg Hildebrandt are twins (Greg is actually five minutes older), born thirty-nine years ago in Detroit. As kids they created their own puppets, marionettes and elaborate costumes and masks out of household objects, paints, scraps of cloth and cardboard, acting out stories they made up for each other's benefit. Working closely together from the very beginning, they both decided they wanted to work for Walt Disney when they grew up, and started making their own 8mm films and drawings in an attempt to reach that goal.

The twins repeatedly attended any showings of SF and fantasy films such as Disney's *Fantasia* and George Pal's *War of the Worlds*, and read all the Edgar Rice Burroughs, Jules Verne and H.G. Wells books they could find.

Incredibly enough, their only formal education after high school was one year at the Meinzinger School of Art in Detroit, which they attended after getting out of the Army. Their next job together was at the Jam Handy Company in Detroit, a company which makes industrial, training and commercial films for business and television. The experience they gained there, working on storyboards, set design and stop-action and animation techniques, helped them later on when they had to use elaborate props and sketches to visualize complex works of novel length.

Greg married his wife Diana in 1963 and Tim married Rita in 1965, but the two brothers continued working together toward their artistic goals without a lapse. In 1969 they did a film documentary in Africa for the Catholic Church after doing some film work for Bishop Fulton Sheen, but failed to produce the upbeat type of film the Church wanted. Their interest in the poverty and unrest of Africans was not what their employers had in mind and the brothers were relieved of their duties.

This resulted in a long period of uncreative work in which children's books illustrated in imitative style were commissioned by various publishers. Some advertising work in the same vein caused the

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Hildebrandts to long for some avenue of creative expression in which they could do their own original work. They wished they could illustrate the works of one of their favorite authors, J.R.R. Tolkien, and started doing sketches to illustrate passages in his books.

In the 1979 book, *The Art of the Brothers Hildebrandt* (Ballantine, $8.95), the twins' friend and agent Ian Summers recalled meeting them for the first time. As art director at that time for Ballantine Books, Summers was charged with finding new artists for the mid-'70s Tolkien illustrated calendars. The 1973-74 editions had used the author's own illustrations and the 1975 had featured Tim Kirk. In the Kirk calendar was an invitation: "We hope to find other artists who are inspired to do their own conceptions of *Middle-earth* so that we shall be able to offer calendars for future years." The artists responded by arranging for formal appointments and bringing portfolios of their work. Ian Summers was surprised on February 7, 1975 by the unannounced appearance in his reception area of bearded twin brothers with paint-covered clothes and a plastic garbage bag filled with over fifty Tolkien drawings.

Hoping that their painting would match their superb drawings, he hired them to illustrate the cover of Tolkien's *Smith of Wooten Major and Farmer Giles of Ham*. When the Hildebrandts' cover painting and Tolkien calendar work turned out to be as fine as their drawings, the twins were signed to a contract. The bestselling Tolkien calendars for 1976 through 1978 featured their works and a retrospective 1980 Tolkien Desk Calendar (Ballantine, $6.95) was recently published. Tim and Greg stated that they owe it to Tolkien fans to let other artists take over now, and they have declined to accept another calendar contract.

Never content to stay in one field without expanding their artistic horizons, they decided to move outward from their Tolkien work. They had been mulling over an epic fantasy of their own, in the form of preliminary sketches when they discussed the idea with Ian Summers. At an awards lunch of the Society of Illustrators, the twins were present to accept a Gold Medal for their cover of the book, *Clive: Inside The Record Business* (an interpretation based on a portrait of a prince by Renaissance artist Tintoretto). Summers listened to their ideas and encouraged them to write their own book, which they did in collaboration with their friend Jerry Nichols. At first, they were afraid they might not be writers but Summers told them they had been creating all along by adding story elements to their illustrations and original art.

Conceived of from the start as a film and book combination, *Urshurak* tells the story of an epic struggle for freedom waged by the peoples of the continent Urshurak. The races and cultural groupings of Urshurak had traditionally been separate from each other, dwelling in isolated areas and cultivating independence. An ancient prophecy has decreed that ". . . before the sun sets on the Day of Fulfillment, the two of the same blood shall meet—and both shall be fulfilled. But only one shall bear away the Crownhelm of the White Elves. And in that hour shall be decided the fate of the land of Urshurak."

This can have only one meaning: that Prince Ailwon the White Elf or the Death Lord Torgon will struggle to the death and forever change the lives of all in Urshurak. Torgon's goal has been to enslave the innocent people allied with Ailwon, most of whom are naturally nonviolent. Torgon has gathered followers such as his gargoyle creatures the Vilderone and the shape-changing Gorta the Witch, and is preparing to destroy his enemies in the South.

The scattered and leaderless allies of Prince Ailwon are not sure they want to fight with him, since there is danger of death by making a move to aid him. However, he convinces each group that the consequences of inaction are worse. He assembles such groups as the followers of Ali Ben Kara (one of the rare black men in fantasy epics), the Amazons of Zan-Dura (strong women who have evolved into a fiercely independent warrior society), the Norsepeople of Norbruk and the Dwarfs of Penderak among others. Sir Hugh Oxhine, a Vandorian archer who saved Prince Ailwon's life, joins the band and ends up falling in love with the aloof beau-

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ty Zyra, an Amazon who cannot afford to love him as this would compromise the ideals of her people.

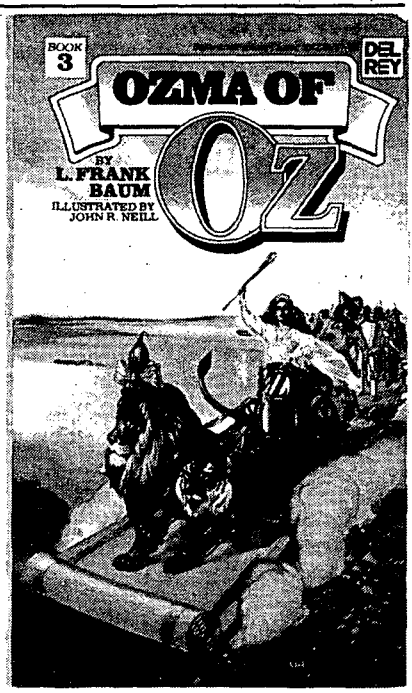
Perhaps a rarity is the character development in *Urshurak*. Although some fantasy characters change and develop during the course of events, *Urshurak* features cultural groups and races which change their perspectives about each other based on interrelations during the epic struggle. Roles of women and minorities are explored here but without soapbox polemics.

The book climaxes in a fierce battle in which swords flash and fireballs are hurled against castle doors. Some will criticize the book as another Tolkien imitation. They will be wrong to do so. There can be many interpretations of, and variations on the epic quest fantasy, and it is unfair to say that only one author can hold sway in that genre. It's funny that nobody gets upset when more than one Western or locked room mystery or time travel SF novel come out, but only J.R.R. Tolkien is allowed to write about little beings who live in the woods and follow a young hero on a quest. *Urshurak* provides colorful and worthwhile entertainment on its own and should be judged in that light.

The sixteen full color paintings and eighty black-and-white drawings by the Brothers Hildebrandt are magnificent, as usual. Crackling flames, terrifying and misshapen creatures and gentle, pastoral wood-folk are handled with consummate skill. There are also thirty-four illustrated chapter headings and a map of the lands of Urshurak in this well-produced trade format paperback. Bantam has used good quality paper and clear text layout and especially high quality paper for the color pages and this enhances the look of the book. The 405 pages of text are never a mere addition to the art at any point and one can see the care which went into the integration of the two elements.

Urshurak can be read with pleasure by people who do not count themselves as hardcore fantasy fans as well as by devotees. Its rich backgrounds and settings and vivid illustrations should please a wide audience.

In Urshurak, at a tavern/inn/meeting hall combination in Penderak, the Dwarfs hold important debates followed immediately by ribald parties. There is a massive wooden beam in which is carved: "LIBERTY - SOLIDARITY - TOMFOOLERY." This motto might also be applied to the Brothers Hildebrandt, who have produced some of the highest achievements in fantasy illustration. *Urshurak* is another milestone in their careers and in fantasy fiction. Previous books have been illustrated after being written, by people other than the author. This marks the only time the artists themselves have done an integrated package of text and illustrations. The fact that it is such a success is a tribute to the Brothers Hildebrandt and their loving, caring attitude toward fantasy.



The Oz Series (#1-7, Del Rey, $1.95 per book): *The Wizard of Oz, The Land of Oz, Ozma of Oz, Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz, The Road to Oz, The Emerald City of Oz, The Patchwork Girl of Oz,* all by L. Frank Baum.

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Now that Del Rey has firmly established itself as a leading force in SF and fantasy publishing, Judy Lynn del Rey has taken the chance of publishing one of her favorite series, the 14 Oz books written by L. Frank Baum between 1900 and 1920. (There were another 19 written after Baum's death by Ruth Plumly Thompson.) This is a risk since the first seven Oz books were the total Del Rey release for one month and it is possible that adult fantasy readers may reject the idea. Naturally, any children you know should be given a complete set without fail, but Ms. del Rey knows that Ray Bradbury, Gore Vidal and Stephan R. Donaldson are among the adult fans of the series and that others will be attracted to such qualities as the satirical elements of these entertaining stories.

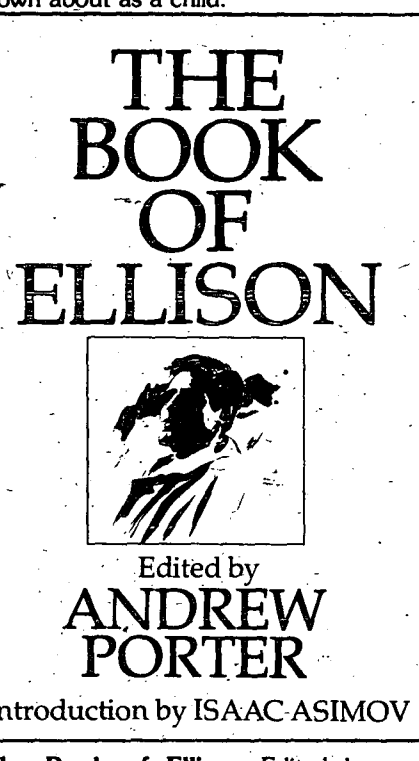
I love the vividly colorful Michael Herring covers, the fact that the original John R. Neill interior illustrations have been retained and that each of the volumes has space for your name under "This Book Belongs To:". Oz, by the way, was named after the "O-Z" drawer in a file cabinet.

There isn't room to discuss all the glittering facets of this gem of a series The books go far beyond the Judy Garland film and do not include the obligatory "Gee, it was only a dream" factor which was added to the film so as not to turn off practical-minded adults. Reading these recaptures some of the innocence we had as children when we devised our own explanations for everyday happenings and the mundane world seemed only a cover for the secret wonders behind the scenes.

In *The Emerald City of Oz*, there is a kingdom of Utensia, where all the people are kitchen utensils. The collander is the high priest since he is "the holiest thing in the kingdom" and a corkscrew is a lawyer since he is most accustomed to appearing at the bar.

Bunbury is a land where the people are all baked goods such as Pop Over and C. (for Cinnamon) Bunn. There is a butter mine, flour soil and such things as a bread and butter doormat, waffle fence and a shortcake piano.

You may have to muscle your way past some pretty big "kids" at the bookstore to buy all the Oz books before they are sold out. Thanks, Del Rey Books, for this series I wish I had known about as a child.



The Book of Ellison Edited by Andrew Porter, introduction by Isaac Asimov. *(Algol Press, $5.95 paperback, P.O. Box 4175, New York, N.Y. 10017).*

You can be neutral about A. Bertram Chandler and lukewarm towards Raymond Z. Gallun but not

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about this man. People either love or hate Harlan Ellison and this has helped make him one of the best known figures connected with SF or fantasy. Andrew Porter of Starship magazine (formerly known as Algol) has assembled a balanced selection of essays, convention speeches and two fanzine short stories by Mr. Ellison. Robert Silverberg, David Gerrold and others have contributed essays which add their personal views about him.

This book is a pure delight for Ellison-lovers. The hardcover sold out quickly and this trade paperback is going into multiple printings. And this isn't even an illustrated graphic story book.

While Asimov's two volume autobiography and Pohl's *The Way The Future Was* filled us in on details about those writer's lives, Harlan Ellison was way ahead of them years ago with his voluminous introductions, personal essays and excruciatingly detailed short story road-maps to the pain in his life.

Newcomers to his writings learn quickly that he is *not* a science fiction writer, but a writer or a fantasist. "SF" cannot be placed on the covers or spines of his books, under contractual arrangements with his publishers. He will fight back if pulled, pushed or prodded by convention fans and he doesn't like being picked apart by fanzine writers (who does?). As with his stories, the key words to his life are survival and revenge. Mr. Ellison protects his personal privacy and the sanctity of his writings, while on the other hand, he thrusts his chin out in public, daring hotshot critics to attack him for his ideas. Never fearing a knockdown battle, he has assumed the burdens of the Civil Rights, Anti-War and Feminist Movements in an SF field filled to overflowing with conservatives, technology-addicts and followers of the precepts of John W. Campbell, Jr.

No one who is aware of the fact that Mr. Ellison is an endlessly fascinating writer will be disappointed by this supurb collection of Ellisonia.

The Fantasies of Harlan Ellison. With New Foreward by Michael Moorcock, New Introduction by Harlan Ellison and New Afterword by Robert Thurston. *(Greg Press, $15.00. Gregg Press, G.K. Hall & Co., 70 Lincoln St., Boston, MA 02111).*

Gregg's deluxe reprint edition is the first hardcover publication of two classic collections: *Paingod and Other Delusions* (1965) and *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream* (1967). These are not among Ellison's very best; those might be found in *The Deathbird Stories, Approaching Oblivion, Strange Wine* or perhaps in his most recent magazine appearances, as he seems to get better every year. The collection does contain important stories from Ellison's early period, at a time when he was beginning to receive some well-deserved recognition.

Refusing to force himself into the mold of novelist, where he seemed to get agoraphobic in the presence of hundreds of blank pages and chapter headings, he was determined to build his reputation based on his best form: the short story. Writing only three novels (one, *Doomsman*, is SF) he sought to overcome the old publishers adage "Story collections don't sell, novels sell."

These two collections, which include such superb stories as "Pretty Maggie Moneyeyes" and "Delusion For A Dragon Slayer," netted the writer a mere $1750 each for their first paperback editions. This lack of remuneration, the fight against being known as a writer of "that Buck Rogers stuff" and even the booksellers' category "SF" itself became too much for Ellison to stand. He spearheaded a revolt which

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expanded the horizons of the genre, gained more money for everyone in the field and saddled him with a reputation as the bad guy who gave us the New Wave.

His stories all used to have the traditional structure and followed the standard magazine fiction formulae in order to get published at all. Many of his later works have broken and fragmented those structures but I have yet to read one which is just a vignette, a monologue or a hopeless diatribe. In this two-in-one volume as elsewhere, his characters are pitted against dangers which test the survival value of their identities or their lives. Is their triumph of survival or revenge any less "thriller material" than Commander Brad Blaster's destruction of the Icky Blobs of the Planet Grzzyll?

This book is well worth $15.00. Its high quality covers, sewn signature binding and acid-free paper should be found in all editions of Ellison's books. I hope my complete paperback collection of early works by the author will hold up long enough for Gregg or someone to do reprints. Ellison collectors out there should buy this book to encourage Gregg in the idea that individuals as well as libraries are interested in high quality editions of Ellison's early works.

The Martian Chronicles by Ray Bradbury. Illustrated by Ian Miller. *(Bantam, $6.95.)*

You are already familiar with this classic, perhaps having read it years ago. Of the incredible 18,284,000 Bradbury books sold so far by Bantam Books, 3,092,000 were the rack-size paperback of *The Martian Chronicles*.

As with the TV production, artist Ian Miller's challenge was to illustrate the book without destroying the views of Mars that readers had already created with their imaginations. Miller's 28 black and white drawings are a triumph in that they serve as gentle guides rather than obtrusive manuals for building Bradbury's unique version of Mars in our minds.

I usually prefer the Boris Vallejo, Michael Herring or Estaban Moroto approach: detailed superrealism. In the case of this book of sparse physical description, the Ian Miller approach is best and Bantam was wise to select him for this six by nine inch deluxe paperback edition. The eerie, ethereal quality of his drawings comes close to capturing that elusive element of Bradbury's prose. Miller's work can also be found adorning the covers of the recent reissues of the Bantam Bradbury editions of rack-size paperbacks.

Heroics by George Alec Effinger *(Doubleday, $7.95).*

This novel isn't the type of book my faithful readers have come to expect in my columns. It isn't an old-fashioned SF thriller or a collection of classics by an old master. *Heroics* will disappoint those who prefer a conventional plot to guide them. I was reminded of Robert Silverberg's *Son of Man*, a little-read book which I liked very much. In both books there is a sense of grandeur which comes from total freedom to explore ideas about life, death and reality. It is true that in both there is a feeling that anything can happen on any page, but also that anything could be undone again a few pages later. That is a problem, but in the hands of a good writer it becomes the best way to accomplish what has to be done in the novel.

Irene, the 82 year old heroine (one of the few in any form of literature, SF nor not) embarks on a quest to find the nearly mythical California and some extremely rare 20th century Depression Glass for her collection. In this far future world, boredom and listlessness are the price paid for a

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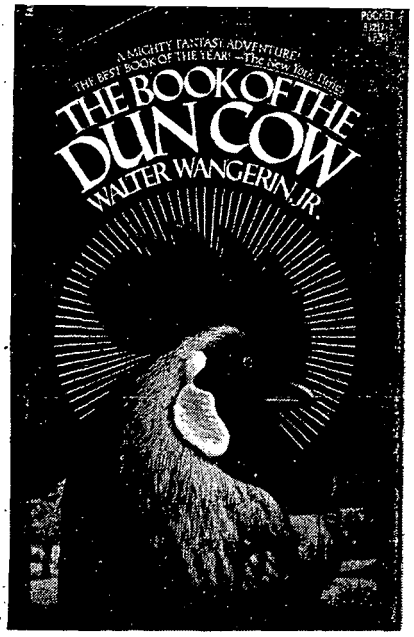
climate-controlled, no-risk existence. A young brat named Elyse has just broken a covered crystal Doric butter dish, and then has run out of the house laughing as Irene tries to control herself so she won't shatter like the glass. Irene has been shunted away from the rest of the family due to her age. Forced into a new childhood of uselessness and the terrible loneliness caused by isolation, she links up with the mysterious Glorian (a character from Effinger's *What Entropy Means To Me)* and sets out for California.

Everything is done within the cosmic guidelines of The Powers That Be. Glorian is empowered to change Irene into a man or woman, old or young, and himself into a young Cub Scout complete with merit badges, in response to the required challenges which Irene must face along the way to her special destiny. Effinger turns reality like a kaleidoscope, examining the meaning and nature of fear, loneliness and life itself from various angles, often giving us mutually-exclusive views of each.

Heroics would have been called "New Wave" a few years ago. It is my hope that SF readers have become sophisticated enough by now to accept a worthwhile reading experience regardless of labels or categories. A departure from my usual type of book, admittedly, but a rewarding one.

The Book of the Dun Cow by Walter Wangerin, Jr. *(Pocket Books, $2.50).*

Wangerin is the pastor of a small congregation in Evansville, Indiana. In this book he has tried to avoid the silly sentimentality which afflicted *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* but still explore some religious and philosophical questions. Fantasy books with animal characters such as *Watership Down* and *The Plague Dogs* have been popular recently. Wangerin is



wise to avoid simple direct symbolism for Christ, Job or Daniel in a book with cardboard characters. He has done a better job than that and manages to build reader empathy and respect for the animals as the book progresses from its rather slow and dull beginning.

The book is named after a 12th century Gaelic book, which was in turn named after its dun colored cowhide cover. Wangerin's story concerns a grumpy, authoritarian rooster named Chaunticleer who lives at the time when the Sun revolved around the Earth and the animals could still speak. Mundo Cani Dog, John Wesley Weasel and a hen named Pertolote (Chaunticleer's love interest), are among the good animals. They are called upon to fight an epic battle against the villains: the serpent-tailed rooster Cockatrice, the armies of slithering basilisks and the monstrous Wyrm, who sleeps below the Earth's surface and waits to be unleashed to destroy all good on the Earth.

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Chaunticleer asks God why all the innocent, peace-loving animals face slaughter by the evil creatures. Wangerin introduces questions about religious ideas without any heavy-handed replies or easy maxims. Sacrifice and unfair martyrdom are found in the book just as in real-life, where happy endings are never guaranteed either.

An unsual and thought-provoking book. I will be interested in seeing the forthcoming sequel. ■

Games fen will Play

by Greg Costikyan

This article deals only with the three best known sets of fantasy role-playing rules, since fantasy games still dominate the role-playing genre by far; but a future column will deal with role-playing games in areas other than fantasy.

FANTASY ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

Beginners' Dungeons & Dragons ($10), **The Monster Manual** ($10), **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: The Players' Handbook** ($10), **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: Dungeonmasters' Guide** ($15), from Tactical Studies Rules, PO Box 756, Lake Geneva, WI, 53147.

Chivalry & Sorcery, designed by Ed Simbalist and Wilf Backhaus, from Fantasy Games Unlimited, PO Box 182, Roslyn, NY, 11576, ($12).

Runequest, designed by Steve Perrin and Ray Turney, from The Chaosium, Box 6302, Albany, CA, 94706 ($10).

THE FIRST role-playing game was published by an obscure company called "Tactical Studies Rules" in 1973; it was DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS, designed by E. Gary Gygax and David Arneson. D&D proved to be the progenitor of a whole new genre of simulation games; in six rapid years, the hobby that D&D started expanded to include dozens of rules systems, innumerable fanzines, and half-a-dozen professional or semi-professional magazines.

In a role-playing game, one person—the gamesmaster—designs a universe, peoples it, and constructs its cultures. The gamesmaster, in short, does what in science fiction circles is sometimes called "playing The Game"—devising an entire world from top to bottom, complete with enough detail to convince the reader—or in this case the players—of its reality. Obviously, the detail that a gamesmaster gives to a world, the scientific and sociological accuracy that he builds into it, and the complexity of its peoples and societies are all a function of his knowledge, creativity, and available time. By "world," I do not necessarily mean a single planet, but any stage across which human characters may move, from a science fiction fictional universe complete with thousands of stars and innumerable planets, to a single village—to, for that matter, New York City in the Marvel universe, or Chicago as depicted in *film noir*.

Thus, a "world" can be practically any locale of any extent and size; the detail with which it is portrayed can be of any degree. The specific aspects of a world are limited only by the nature of the role-playing rules which the gamesmaster uses—obviously, a set of fantasy rules is inapplicable to a game set in Prohibition America; as a set of rules dealing with professional wrestling is equally inapplicable to a fantasy setting. But many role-playing rules are currently on the market, and while there are not a sufficient number to cover every aspect of human history and exis-

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tence, the variety is sufficient to simulate a potentially unlimited number of different worlds, with a little imagination.

After the gamesmaster has devised his world—or, at least, has constructed enough of it to be able to run a campaign—each of the players constructs a character who lives in the world. Each player has a single character; he *is* this character in the world of the gamesmaster's imagination. In the same way that the possible worlds are unlimited, the number of types of characters is unlimited. A player's character is not expected—indeed, is discouraged—to act in the same way he, the player, would act; since this is a *role-playing* game, each player is expected to develop a persona—a "character"—for his character. This is, in fact, the most enjoyable aspect of role-playing gaming—the ability to adopt any character that pleases your fancy, to act as you wish you could in real life, or as you would never act under any circumstances. Perfectly nice people may find it enjoyable to play the most despicable of black-hearted villains; acne-ridden, bookish teenagers may find the role of the pure-hearted hero cathartic.

This is not to say that each player is able to do whatever he wants; he is constrained by the rules and the gamesmaster. Without such constraints, a role-playing game might easily become a case of "Bang, bang! You're dead!" "No I'm not!" In a role-playing game, each character starts off with certain abilities; while his persona is entirely at the discretion of the player, his powers are not. Characters generally begin fairly weak in terms of physical, fiscal and political power, and must work within the framework of the game to increase their effectiveness. In this lies the conflict; the characters must venture out into the gamesmaster's world, in search of fame and fortune. In many ways, the gamesmaster's role becomes one of devising ways for the players to gain their objectives, but only after defeating opposition. Depending on the nature of the game and the characters, a character's "objective" may be anything from becoming Czar of Slobbovia to attaining unity with the godhead to knocking off Al Capone to gaining the Nobel Peace Prize. Similarly, the characters may "defeat the oppositon" through brawn or magical prowess, blackmail and lies, or even just recourse to the laws of the realm.

But I have gone on long enough about the general nature of role-playing games; it is time to deal with specifics.

DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS—the first role-playing game—was published by TSR in 1973. The rules were a model of bad writing; the art was atrocious; the layout and graphics were unprofessional. D&D was overpriced and crude. It sold like wildfire. TSR is now the world's third largest publisher of hobby games, largely as the result of D&D's popularity.

D&D's execution was mundane, but its conception was brilliant. With the D&D rules as a basis, an active imagination, and a willingness to ignore the rules when they conflicted with his conceptions, an intelligent gamesmaster was able to create a fantasy universe; and, by interacting with his players, to tell a fantasy story. D&D was a role-playing game, something heretofore unknown, and consequently could provide the framework for a game of the sort that I have described above. It should be praised for its introduction of a startling, new and enjoyable form of gaming, while bemoaned for its mediocre execution.

D&D caught on not only with wargamers, but with sf/fantasy fen and college students. Its appeal was universal, for even those unacquainted with fantasy had been exposed to fairy tales. An entire fandom soon sprang up around the game. The first fanzine was published by Lee Gold in 1975—ALARUMS & EXCURSIONS, an APA which still survives and has grown to mammoth proportions. Other magazines, both fan and semi-pro, sprang up everywhere in the English-speaking world. The evident faults of the D&D rules and the consequent necessity for innovation on the part of gamesmasters bred development and publication of innumerable new game systems and rules modules in these zines. Diversification was the word of the day; today, two fantasy worlds are almost guaranteed to be so different that the rules each uses is unrecognizable from the other's, even if both worlds owe their initial conception to D&D.

TSR followed up the publication of D&D with four D&D Supplements; GREYHAWK, which suffered many of the

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same problems as D&D but which added much useful material; BLACKMOOR, which was essentially worthless; ELDRITCH WIZARDRY, which contained material of dubious value; and GODS, DEMI-GODS, AND HEROES, which was worse.

Eventually, TSR decided to redesign D&D, and republish it in new form. This decision was taken for several reasons; TSR recognized that the D&D rules had problems, and wished to fix them; they wished to take all the rules systems which had been published in the original D&D, the supplements, and TSR's magazine, and combine them into a single set of rules for easy access; and TSR's continued growth depended on producing new material which would sell. Since most of TSR's games, with the exception of D&D, were extremely poor, the cash flow which the new, repackaged D&D would create—for surely no respectable gamesmaster would be without a new set—would keep TSR comfortably in the black. To justify the republication of D&D, TSR decided to redo the game entirely, adding new material and expanding the rules, rather than simply reformatting it and cleaning up the rules.

In 1977, TSR published the first element in their redesign of D&D, "BEGINNERS' D&D". BD&D cost $10, and consisted of a rules booklet, some charts, and dice. The game had better written rules and better graphics than the original D&D. But while BD&D cleared up the ambiguities and inconsistencies of the original D&D, it changed none of its structural limitations and problems. The idea of an introductory role-playing game for beginners was a good one; but TSR, with its usual panache, managed to make BD&D so simple and limited as to defeat the entire purpose of a role-playing game. The purpose of such a game, as I've implied, is to allow a gamesmaster to use his imagination in the construction of a world; and to allow the players to create characters as varied as human beings tend to be. BD&D discouraged a gamesmaster from constructing anything other than the usual, boring series of catacombs populated with monsters in a random and logically impossible manner; and encouraged the players to envision their characters as differing only in power, and not at all in philosophy or persona—interchangeable killing machines. To an extent, D&D as a whole always suffered from these problems, but in the limited forum of BD&D, the strict limitations on imagination as well as limitations in rules complexity resulted in a stultifying game.

In 1978, TSR published THE MONSTER MANUAL and the ADVANCED D&D PLAYERS' HANDBOOK. In 1979, they published the DUNGEONMASTERS' GUIDE. Each of the three booklets consisted of many pages of dense type, bound in a hardcover; the first two sold for $10, and the third for $15. Together, the three made up ADVANCED DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS.

If the original D&D's execution was mundane and its conception brilliant, AD&D's execution was professional and its conception mundane. D&D's success was due to its introduction of the role-playing concept; if AD&D were to be an improvement, it must not rest on D&D's laurels, but produce new, worthwhile and useful material.

AD&D contained few of the ambiguities and errors of D&D; the rules were complete and well-explained. Much new material was added to AD&D in addition to that collected from TSR's supplements and magazines. But the new material, while useful, did not provide the systems which intelligent gamesmasters demanded, nor expand the horizons of role-playing gaming. AD&D was, truly, D&D redone, incorporating few of the new concepts and innovations of the years since D&D was first published.

One of the trends in role-playing gaming is toward the introduction of rules which allow a gamesmaster to devise a world in accordance with our scientific and historical knowledge. Other role-playing games provide complete rules for the interaction of characters within a society; AD&D's rules governing societies are incomplete and uninspired. Gamesmasters often develop a cosmology and mythology for their world; AD&D locks a gamesmaster into a single such cosmology with the Official TSR Stamp of Approval. Gamesmasters often try to develop geological systems, weather systems and terrain systems which reflect the way worlds really work;

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AD&D devotes a page to weather systems and contains at least two errors of fact in that page. The wildly variable nature of role-playing games necessitates the freedom of a gamesmaster to alter the rules as he sees fit; AD&D, while theoretically encouraging this, in fact condemns any modification of the AD&D rules, claiming that AD&D is finely balanced and that any such modification is *a priori* for the worse.

In short, AD&D shows an appalling lack of knowledge on the part of TSR of the trends in role-playing gaming, the types of rules which intelligent gamesmasters desire, and of the basics of intelligent game design. More than this, the tone of AD&D and the essays about the philosophy of role-playing which it contains evince a certain arrogance and self-satisfaction on the part of the designers.

However, the failures of TSR and AD&D do not imply an impoverishment in the field of role-playing gaming. Others have expanded the state of the art, and continue to introduce innovative concepts and systems.

In 1977, Fantasy Games Unlimited—another small company—published CHIVALRY AND SORCERY, designed by Ed Simbalist and Wilf Backhaus. Although C&S has not acquired the popularity of D&D, and in many instances has not percolated down to role-players who have little contact with active role-playing fans, it attained immediate appreciation among those who are actively involved in role-playing fandom.

The C&S rules were a massive work of 130 densely-printed pages. Unlike D&D, they covered not only the basics of combat, magic, and monsters, but included well-structured and complex rules governing the interaction of characters in a Medieval European society. C&S included an infinitely more detailed and realistic combat system; and a magical system including more than a dozen different types of magic. Most of the artificial limitations imposed by D&D—the strict division into "character classed," artificial rules such as those prohibiting "Magic Users" from wielding swords, etc.—were eliminated; the limitations imposed by C&S were based on social restrictions and historical reality, not by an arbitrary conception of "game balance". C&S was the first true role-playing game—a game in which an entire world is created, complete with societies, histories and arcane magic, in which characters are free to pursue any goal they desire.

C&S's layout was poor; graphically, it was unappealing. But the quality of its rules, the intelligence of its design, the scholarly nature of its historical research, and its innovative approach to world construction guaranteed it a place in every good gamesmaster's collection.

One of C&S's good points—and one of the things that has resulted in its limited distribution—is its immense detail. This detail means that many rules systems which gamesmasters must otherwise develop for a campaign are available for use when needed; but it also means that the C&S rules are a massive tome, difficult for a novice to wade through. The complexity of certain of the rules means that a potential gamesmaster has a great deal of material to understand and digest before he can use the C&S rules.

Another drawback with the game is the fact that the only society it is designed to simulate is that of Medieval Europe. Thus, a gamesmaster who wishes to place his fantasy campaign in some other setting must either devise social rules himself, or be unable to use most of C&S. This drawback is mitigated by the fact that, since C&S's publication, Fantasy Games has published a number of excellent C&S supplements dealing with barbarian societies and intelligent saurians; planned for the future is a supplement for Medieval Asian societies.

Nonetheless, C&S is superior to D&D in every way. As a model of a complicated but well-executed role-playing game, C&S stands unsurpassed; I recommend it highly to those who are already involved in role-playing and wish a superior substitute for D&D.

RUNEQUEST was published by The Chaosium—yet another small company—in 1978; it was designed by Steve Perrin and Ray Turney. RUNEQUEST itself covers only the elements of any role-playing game—combat, magic, and monsters. Rules for world design, further advancement of players, and social systems are to be covered in two booklets which Chaosium promises to publish eventually, to be

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entitled HEROQUEST and GODQUEST. Despite its limitations, RUNEQUEST shows that there is still room in the field for a well-conceived set of rules. If C&S is AD&D done right, RUNEQUEST is BD&D done right.

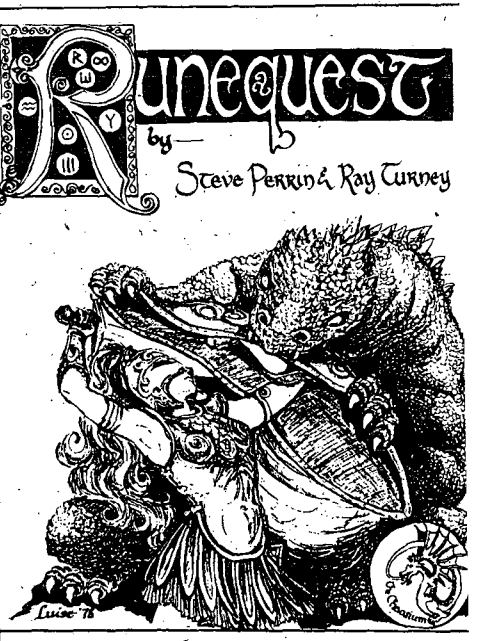
RUNEQUEST'S graphics, too, are unprofessional, although its artwork is superior to anything in C&S or D&D. The RUNEQUEST rules themselves are relatively simple, containing perhaps one-fourth as many words as C&S. The artificial division of characters into classes and increments of ability by "level" is entirely done away with in RUNEQUEST. Each character is instead assigned a number representing his ability with each of a myriad number of skills—a different number for (for instance), wielding a sword, swimming, speaking a language, riding, etc. In D&D, by comparison, all fighters of a given "level" of experience have equal ability with all weapons; in RUNEQUEST, a character may specialize in one or a few skills, or diversify his abilities.

RUNEQUEST magic is based upon Norse Runic magic. All characters are capable of using magic to one degree or another—there is neither the D&D distinction among "classes" nor C&S's specialization by individuals. However, the more powerful "Rune" magics are restricted to the use of Rune Priests, those who have joined the heirarchy of one of the omnipresent religious Cults in the polytheistic RUNEQUEST world.

C&S's social system is designed for a monotheistic, iron-age Medieval Europe; RUNEQUEST'S rules are written for a polytheistic, bronze-age culture.

RUNEQUEST'S rules are perhaps the best written and most logically developed of the three games. They gradually introduce the reader to the concepts necessary to play the game, developing in a consistent manner. If they have any fault, it is that they are too limited in scope; and one may hope the additional booklets will rectify this problem when they are published.

If C&S is the model of rules for a complicated world, RUNEQUEST is the model of a simpler set of rules designed for a less complicated world. C&S is for those who don't mind complexity, and want the systems for an entire world spelled out;



RUNEQUEST is for those who want a fast-playing active game and who don't mind developing social systems and cultures for their world. I highly recommend RUNEQUEST for those who want an introduction to role-playing, or those who desire a refreshing change from D&D. ■

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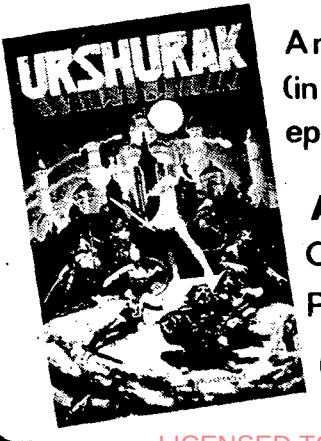

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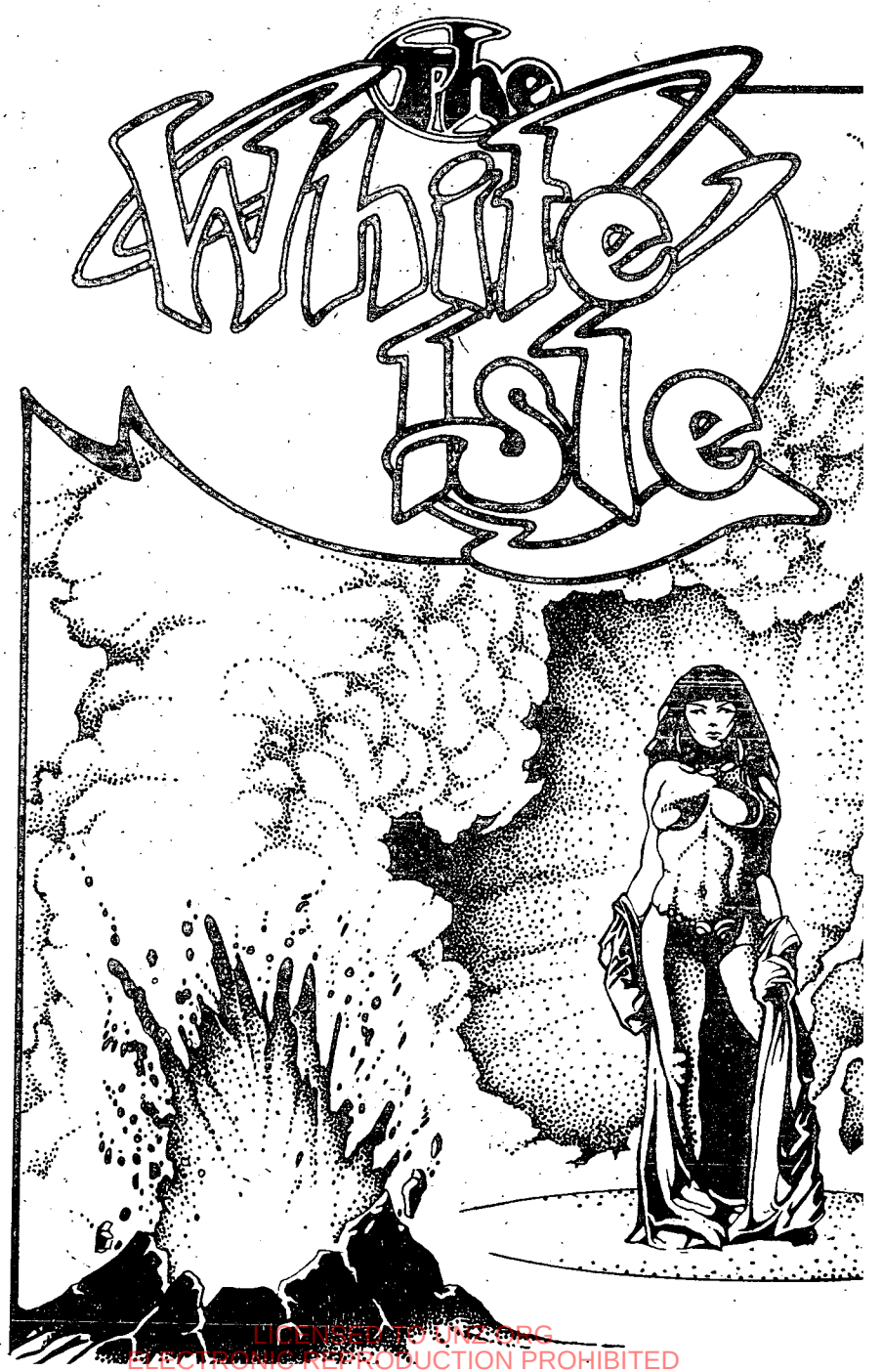

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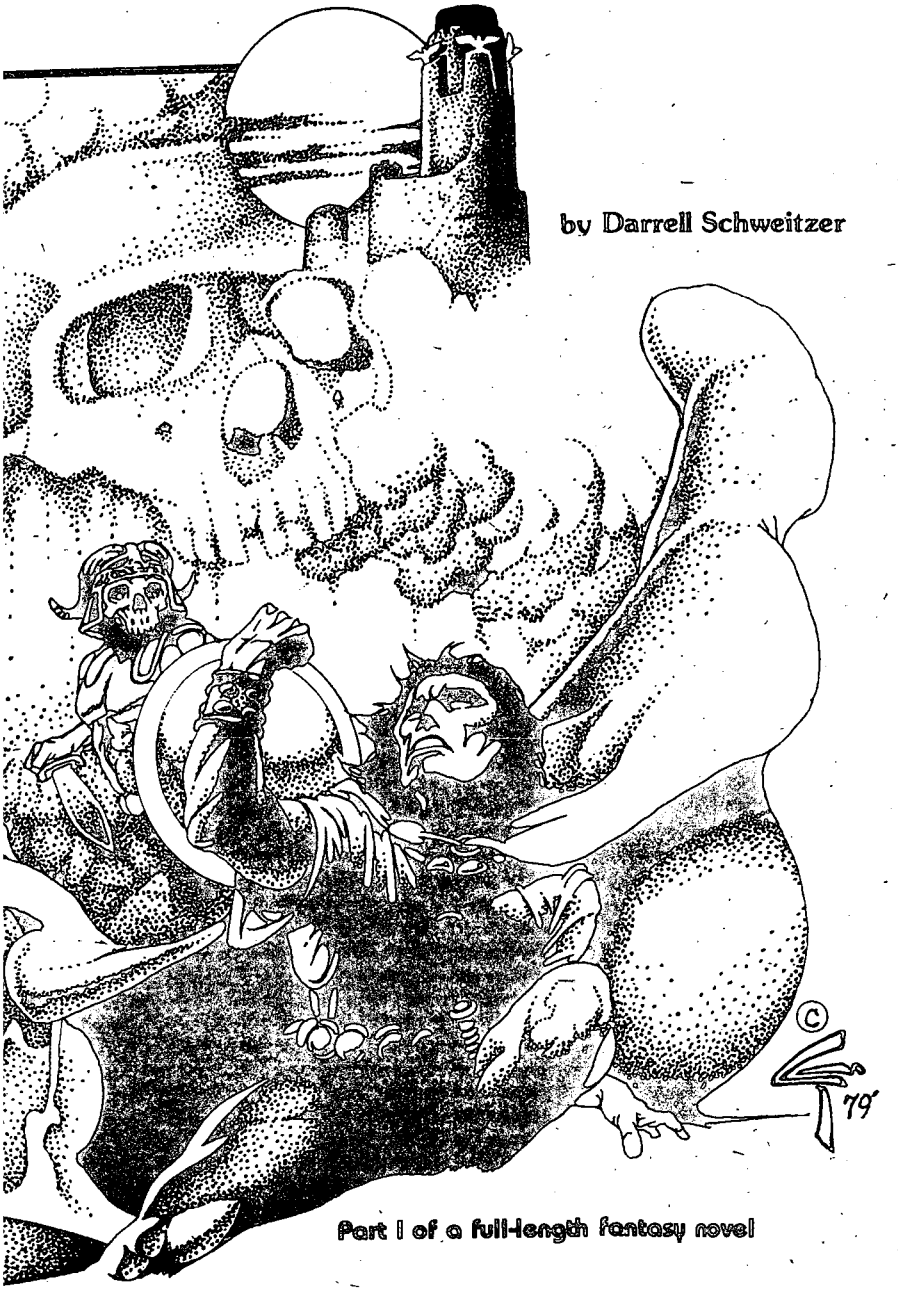
by Darrell Schweitzer



Part I of a full-length fantasy novel

Illustrated by Gary Freeman

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In the middle of light there is shadow.
In the middle of shadow there is darkness.
And in the middle of darkness
there is Rannon.

—*The Song of the Great Stone*

Chapter 1: Beginnings

HEAR ME! Hear now, O Lords and Ladies, the tale of Throdrexon and Hamakara, and of the passing of the Princes of Iankoros. Hear all!

WHAT WERE his first things? His name was Throdrexon Rae Karavasha, and he was the eighty-seventh Prince of the isle of Iankoros, descended in an unbroken line from the second son of the first King the world ever knew. The sons of the first son ruled on the Amyrthelian mainland and were called Kings. They perished long ago. The sons of the second held the islands and flourished. They were the Princes.

He was born on a dark October day, in a room hung with red cloth, and his mother died in the birthing. Rannon took her. When the boy was three years old, again in October, Rannon took the father also, and Throdrexon was Prince over all Iankoros. On that day they brought him, shivering and uneasy, out into the drizzling rain, and he stood in the courtyard of the Phoenix Nest, the castle of the Princes, with many men around him. Dark clouds broiled overhead and the dampness and the wind touched the bones of the living as well as the dead.

His father lay on a litter before him, dressed in all his finery and surrounded by costly goods, the best cloths, the rarest jewels, cunningly fashioned swords, a shining helmet, piles of gold coins, and jugs of wine. On either side his honor guard flanked him, stiff and pale as marble statues. Black banners flapped overhead, dripping with rain.

A general came and laid a gift of spices before his departed Lord, and spoke aloud:

"Rannon, Lord of Death, you who hold the sword over us always, yet spare us for a time through mercy or whim, take these gifts and this man, and by the richness of the gifts we beg you to treat well this man when he comes into your kingdom."

And the general wept as his troops looked on in shocked silence. He didn't believe what he had said about the mercy of Rannon. Why does one who stands unopposed need to be merciful?

The boy fidgeted with the gold necklace he wore. He did not understand, and very little of the grief of the others carried over to him. He looked slowly about, counting the pigeons as they huddled beneath the battlements against the weather. He did not know what this was all about.

Why did his father lie so still?

— THEY TOOK up the body and the goods beside it, a command was given and the drawbridge of the castle lowered. The mourners walked in a line behind their Lord: first the guards of honor; then the new Prince with the wizard and regent Zio Theremderis who held him by the hand; then the noble lords and ladies of the court; all followed by common soldiers and citizens of Iankoros. Their procession passed over the dreary brown hills of Iankoros, in the face of the wind and rain and sleet, singing melancholy dirges and bearing plain black banners, and from afar they looked like a sluggish, dying serpent stretching across the land.

They came at last to the Black Cliffs beneath which the sea crashed onto a narrow stony beach. There waited the Prince's funeral ship, and the litter, together with all the riches to be given to Rannon, were lowered with ropes down to sailors who waited below. They loaded the corpse and the riches aboard the ship, unfurled the sail of the ship — black with the sign of the Phoenix, the seal of the house of Iankoros sewn on in gold, and they launched the vessel out over the breakers, wading out with it until a wind came and took it sailing steadily toward the north, where it vanished after a time in the mist and distance. All present shouted the name of the deceased one as loud as they could, and never again did they speak his name. He belonged to Rannon, now.

On the march back to the castle, when

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the child-Prince was sure that the affair was over, he tugged on the sleeve of Zio Theremderis and said, "Must this always be?"

MONTHS LATER the sun returned to that castle above the sea, the flowers bloomed in the fields again, orchards bore fruit and pigeons cooed in the eaves. Throughout the spring and summer the boy Throdrexon grew, and he was a lively child, full of energy and curiosity, always the bane of his tutors and maids, who could never get him to tarry long in one spot.

Zio Theremderis was the center of his world. The wizard towered over him, his long grey beard infinitely mysterious, and it seemed to Throdrexon that there could be nothing finer in the world than to have such a beard, and to be able to practice magic. Theremderis dwelt high above everybody else in the Tower of Eagles, so called because of the stone birds carved upon it, and it was the greatest of Throdrexon's desires to discover what he did up there. One day he undertook to find out.

He slipped away from his attendants, and by his luck the guard at the door of the Tower of Eagles was lax, not noticing the boy as he entered. Once inside, the Prince saw a stone staircase winding around the windside of the tower up to a distant floor.

He began to climb the well-worn stones, and it seemed to take forever, the floor above seeming to come no closer. Once he looked down at the steps he had ascended coiling down below him; the floor he had entered upon was no larger than a shield.

He drew back from that sight in fear, and clung to the wall of the tower. A spider fell upon him in a shower of dirt. In disgust he brushed it off, and continued his long climb. Three more times he rested, not looking down. He concentrated on his feet, and on each step as he mounted it. When he finally did reach the top he only knew so because his head hit a trapdoor.

Slowly, with all attempts at stealth, he raised the trapdoor and entered the room above. He almost lost hold of the door, but snatched it again, and lowered it carefully to the floor without a sound. There he saw Zio Theremderis sitting at a desk amid piles of books, with bones and bottles and a stuffed alligator or two on the shelves around him, and a piece of parchment stretched out before him under his beard. The old eyes strained to read what was written, and at times the wizard would lean very low, til his nose all but touched the paper.

"What's that?"

"Magic," said Theremderis without looking up.

"I want to learn to do magic. I climbed all the way up here to see."

The old man smiled, and looked away from the manuscript.

"Well! You certainly are a brave boy, and my guard is a fool. Of course, I knew he was. That's why I put him there."

"I wasn't afraid. Not very much."

"You have the makings of a hero, then. But first you will have to learn many things."

"Like magic?"

"Magic is one of them. Wisdom is another. To rule you must be wise."

"Can we start with magic?"

"I suppose so. What would you like to learn?"

"Magic!"

"Yes, but there are many kinds. What do you want to learn to do first?"

The boy ran past the wizard to the window, and looked out over his realm. He paid scant attention to the view. He had seen the land many times before from towers almost as high as this. He could see many towers, and the walls beyond, and the guardsmen patrolling them looked like specks. Green hills rolled, spotted with villages, and the blue sea stretched, with a hint of the mainland on the horizon.

"Come here," he said, and the wizard came. "See that?" He pointed to a pigeon atop one of the nearer towers. "I want to make that bird disappear."

Theremderis took a pen and a scrap of paper, and wrote something.

"Say this word. Can you recognize the letters?"

Slowly, clumsily, the child sounded out each syllable of the massive word, and uttered it.

And in a flash of light the pigeon van-

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ished.

"There! I did it! I did it! My first magic!"

Theremderis was solemn.

"Yes, the pigeon is gone. I don't suppose anyone will notice, except perhaps for its mate. She will sit up day and night, waiting for the bird to return, and he never will. And there are the young baby birds, who will starve and die, because no one will bring them food anymore."

Horror came to the child's face.

"Bring him back! Quick!"

The wizard shook his head sadly. "I can't. You killed him. You used your magic foolishly, without considering its effect. Perhaps next time we should work on wisdom.

Throdrexon began to cry. He buried his face in the wizard's gown and sobbed for a long time. When he had stopped Theremderis took him up and carried him all the way down to the base of the tower. Neither said a word.

OVER THE years the Prince grew and there was great promise in him. He was a handsome boy, with a thin, fair face beneath a mass of brown curls, and he had a good disposition and a quick wit. Under the tutorage of his regent, Zio Theremderis, he learned much and learned it quickly, and soon his erudition startled many visitors to the court. At the age of five he could read and write his own language fluently, and was already paging through every book he could lay his hands on. At six he could speak Sityani. At seven he began to compose good verse in the classical mode, and entertained everyone who listened to him read.

As he entered his teens, generals were called in to teach him the arts of war, and they too were pleased. The Prince was slender and not very large; he could not wrestle well, but he was quick and agile. With a sword he was very good, and at running no one could match him. In matters of strategy he was quite adept, and grasped the principles of the subject with great speed. In a short while, he was winning battles on paper which had baffled the heroes of the past on the battlefield. On manuevers he was a splendid figure in armor.

For the first time since the day in the tower, Theremderis touched again on the subject of magic. At first, he amazed the boy with elementary feats of illusion, then took him on flights through the air, and more than once transformed him into some beast or fowl, so that he might see the world through new eyes. Usually, when these changes were over Throdrexon would laugh at what he had seen, and the absurdity of men would be given life by the wit and substance in his verse.

Magic itself, when one actually got down to the mechanics of it, was not all that exciting. First there were long lectures, for weeks on end, punctuated by strenuous quizzes on the history and philosophy of magic as espoused by the various ancient sages, and the boy had to memorize the names and deeds (and occasionally the dooms) of all the notable wizards the world had ever known. Then came the basic methods. Throdrexon hoped he would be able to conjure up something, but found himself doing nothing more than mere rote memory work, this time tediously learning all manner of formulae and secret words. It seemed that most incantations fell into forms like classical poetry did, but there was no system of *sound* to it. No rhyme, no meter—the ear could not tell when it was slightly off. Each of the standard incantations had to be completely memorized and written down without error. Once the boy asked if things had to be that exact, and Theremderis replied that the first improper spell cast by a wizard was also his last. He spent the whole afternoon illustrating this point with the most horrifying examples he could find.

Finally they came to deep magic, the summoning of spirits, and the peering into the future.

"These things," Theremderis said with the utmost gravity, "are to be used only when all earthly resources have failed. Better it is to pluck a white-hot iron out of a furnace with your bare hands than to call upon a being from the Outer Spaces. Summon them only when you have nothing to lose, because all is already lost. Don't consider doing it otherwise."

He showed Throdrexon a stone in the wall of the tower room which was loose. Behind it was a golden casket which could be opened only with a word. He told the

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boy the word and bade him speak it, and the lid came off. Within was the Scroll of Summoning.

Quite unlike many magical documents, this one was not stained and moldering, and it was not written in some arcane script. It looked more like a supply list a chief steward might make. There were no mystical signs on it, only three columns of names, written in a modern hand, perhaps Theremderis' own, but they were the names of all the demons that were known to have names, and the words of binding and unbinding for each entity.

This was the key to all serious sorcery. The boy handled it gently, looked it over quickly, and put it back into the box. He spoke the opening word backwards, and the lid reaffixed itself. Theremderis replaced it behind the stone.

"I hope you never have to use that," he said. And Throdrexon hoped so also, and heeded him in all things.

Chapter 2: "Gone the Eagle, Gone the Dove"

ONE AFTERNOON in the summer of his seventeenth year, Throdrexon looked out the window of the Tower of Eagles over the land, and saw coming up from the sea a long column of men—soldiers whose armor gleamed in the sunlight, servingmen with burdens on their backs, courtiers and two great litters, each borne by a dozen slaves. Dust rose from beneath their feet as they went, for the ground was very dry.

He called his teacher to him as he went, saying, "What is this?"

And Theremderis answered, "A great King comes among us, and shall dine within these walls tonight. His daughter is with him, and they say she is fair. She is of marriagable age."

"Marriagable age?"

"My Prince, it's time you took a wife."

"I hadn't really thought about it."

"Don't worry. I have arranged everything."

"Teacher, will you always arrange my affairs?"

Theremderis smiled. "Only for a little while yet. Then, perhaps, you shall arrange mine."

HER NAME was Hamakara, and she was indeed fair and slim, remaining hidden most of the time beneath veils. Her father, the King of the citadel of Sityan Vlazix and all the lands around it, was a broad-shouldered, muscular man, a little bit gone over to fat and grey hair. His face was overly powdered, his curly beard dripped with perfume, and his clothing was so intricate and garish that nothing among it stood out from the rest.

He gave his greeting, saying, "Hail, illustrious Prince who shall live long and rule well. May the friendship between our realms be as firm as the great oaks which grow in my country."

"And may your land ever be rich," answered the Prince, "and may the rains continue to fall and the oaks grow tall in the mountains and may those mountains hold back your enemies forever."

"Behold," said the King. "I have brought you many gifts." He clapped his hands and men came, bearing fine jewelry and swords, folds of the best silks, and the carven tusk of the *glimich*, which was straight and thin and as long as a cavalry lance.

"And I have gifts for you," replied the Prince, bestowing on his guest jars of spices brought from afar by Iankorosian ships, bottles of the best wine for which the isle was justly famous, gold ornaments, a necklace made from the teeth of the mantichore and a magic stone which always knew the directions.

A feast was held in the largest feasting hall of the Phoenix Nest, and all were pleased by the courtesy of the Prince who always knew what to say and what to do, when to lead and when to follow. He sat atop a throne at the end of the main table with the emblem of his house on a huge shield behind him. The King of Sityan Vlazix sat by his left and Zio Theremderis by his right. Hamakara, the King's daughter, who was then fifteen years of age, sat with her women at the other end of the table. Fifty men of war sat between her and the Prince on either side of the table. Not once during the meal did the two exchange words beyond formal greetings,

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although she gazed upon him and he upon her, each carefully masking their glances. Still, Theremderis and the King noticed, and both smiled.

For many hours dancers danced and musicians played, and poets came to recite the *Song of the Great Stone* and the *Hitarmaal*, while the feasters tasted too many delicacies to be catalogued by anyone but the master cook. Smoke from lamps and incense gathered below the roof while speech and music filled the air. Toasts were drunk and polite courtesies were exchanged, but very little was actually said as the banquet went on and on.

Finally, when the twelfth course of dessert was served (boiled swans' eggs, dipped in honey) and many were patting stomachs, sighing deeply and unloosening belt buckles, all was done and the tables were cleared away. Most of the lesser persons present, the courtiers and officers of lower rank, were dismissed, and couches were brought for the rest. Throdrexon, Theremderis, the Kind of Sityan Vlazix, his daughter Hamakara and a few favorites sat around in a circle, and a game of Rounds was begun.

Rounds is a literary game of ancient origin in which someone composes a stanza of verse, and the other players add to it in turn, going around and around the circle of them until a complete poem is formed, usually a long one. If played well it requires a quick mind, good vocabulary and considerable poetic ability. For this reason it is seldom played well (although often quickly) and thus has become known as the "Agony of Scribes," for it is they who must wear out pens and wrists copying down everything that has been said.

On this night the game was played well. Throdrexon stood out above all, and Theremderis as well showed great skill, as did the King, while his daughter exhibited marvellous fancy. The game had gone on for a while, the recording scribes with high stacks of paper beside them, when Theremderis, who was seated again to the right of his Prince, leaned over and whispered into Throdrexon's ear, "Is she not a great wonder?"

"Yes, indeed she is."

Then Theremderis' turn came and he delivered a verse, and Throdrexon gave one, as did the King who sat by his left, and the poem went down the line again.

"My Prince," whispered the wizard. "It would be well for you to compose a verse which compliments the fair Hamakara. Be subtle, but make yourself understood to those who should understand, and not to those who shouldn't."

So the next time his turn came, Prince Throdrexon said these words:

Empty perches high above,
Gone the eagle, gone the dove.
Together they are bound in love—
They've flown the whole world over.

He said this while looking straight into Hamakara's face, and she smiled shyly and turned away.

THE KING of Sityan Vlazix resided for a month in the castle called the Phoenix Nest. Feasts were given often, and there were many hunts and discussions, plus more games of rounds in the evenings.

The Prince saw more and more of Hamakara. At first he exchanged polite notes with her by messenger, and then carefully supervised visits were arranged, and after a time more private ones. He found himself thinking of Hamakara at odd times of the day, and he would pause in his lessons to consider the look of her eyes, the way she smiled, the things she had laughed at during the last visit. In the margins of his notebooks he composed odes to her beauty, while Zio Theremderis looked on and pretended not to notice.

Both the boy and the girl were experiencing a new emotion. Brought up in the isolation of royal courts in the company of scholars and ministers, they had perhaps developed fondness for certain people, and maybe even devotion, but never love. In a way, Throdrexon loved Theremderis, but it was not the same. This new kind of love grew and blossomed, until a jittery and stuttering Prince of Iankoros, for once not the least bit eloquent and totally unsure of how to phrase anything, blurted the whole matter out to his teacher one day as they sat over a book in the Tower of Eagles, and the wizard was very glad.

Soon the wedding was held. Throdrexon and Hamakara left the hall after-

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wards hand in hand, dressed in matching gowns of flowing blue studded with diamonds, and they went into a secret chamber. When the night had passed they were boy and girl no longer.

Outside the stars shone clear, the moon was nearly full and the omens were good. A pair of hawks lit on the gatehouse roof. Two flying fishes leaped up on a dock by the sea, then slipped back into the water before they could be caught. No shooting stars or comets were observed throughout the night. The sun rose the next morning in the House of the Dragon, near to the Field of the Phoenix.

There was a trace of autumn in the air.

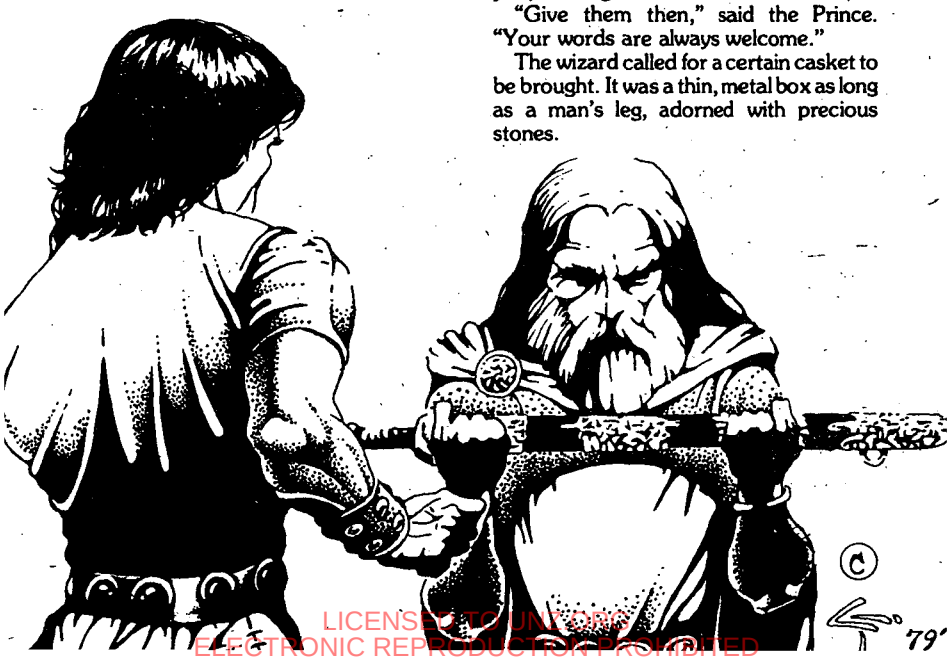
A YEAR passed, and Theremderis rested. Throdrexon Rae Karavasha, now Prince of Iankoros in the fullness of the name, ruled and ruled well. He studied the reports of his ministers and told them what to do. Occasionally there were brief consultations with Theremderis, but there was little left for the wizard to teach. He sat back and proudly watched his pupil perform. All the court loved Throdrexon; there was no intriguing to be found. Perhaps, for a time there was a little worry when the Prince showed more interest in pleasing his bride by giving her balls and taking her on hunts than he did in government, but such fears were set aside when she proved more practical minded than her husband. When he strayed from important business, she like a navigator would steer him back. The two of them presided over judgements, and Hamakara was always astute and stern and fair—in the other sense of the word.

But at the ending of that year, and not three days into the next, a swift ship sailed into the harbor of Iankoros bearing messengers from the King of Sityan Vlazix, Hamakara's father. War had broken out upon the mainland. The King bade Throdrexon, his sworn eternal ally, to travel to him at once, bringing all his armies to help fight the renegade Count of Baracenese who had sold himself to the Witch King from beyond the Thousand Hills. The tale after that was one of invasions, beseigings and the burning of towns.

"This," observed Theremderis, who stood by as the news was delivered, "will be your testing, oh, former pupil. For this occasion I have one last lesson to teach you, and a gift."

"Give them then," said the Prince. "Your words are always welcome."

The wizard called for a certain casket to be brought. It was a thin, metal box as long as a man's leg, adorned with precious stones.



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Theremderis spoke a word and the box opened. He took from it a splendid sword, likewise inlaid with stones on the hilt and scabbard, and kneeling down before the Prince he offered up the weapon, saying, "This is Dran. All your forefathers carried it, back to the very first. There is much power in this blade."

Throdrexon took the sword out of its scabbard and examined the blade. It was of excellent workmanship and of the finest metal, with a cool blue sheen to it. Strange signs were written on it near the tip. He hefted the sword in his hand and saw that it was well balanced.

He smiled. "This is an excellent weapon indeed, and I shall use it well in the war and win glory with it. I thank you."

"And now for the lesson."

"Tell it then. I am all ears."

"Do you remember that time when you were a child, and you made the pigeon disappear?"

"I remember."

"This sword is like the word you spoke that day. Don't use it unless you mean to."

"Well! In warfare I certainly mean to use it!"

"My Prince, beware of rashness. It is told that the Dwarf King who wrought this blade, in the perversity of his nature, laid a word upon it, and that word was, 'Many heads shall this sword cut off, but the last shall be the head of wisdom.' Only a fool would cut off the head of wisdom, of course, and I interpret this word to mean that the last of your line shall use this blade rashly and meet his doom thereby. Be careful!"

"All my ancestors avoided this curse, so it can't be too serious if not one of the eighty-six was ensnared by it. But still, your words are true, and I shall be careful. I'll only cut off the heads of the enemy, and foolish enemies at that."

"I pray you shall win fame."

Then Throdrexon swore a mighty oath on that blade, with Zio Theremderis as witness, that he would strive in this war to win all the glory he could and do honor to his house in this way. He would make Iankoros the envy of all nations, and bring home to her all the richest spoils. By his life, his lands, his honor and this blade, he swore—and he would have sworn by his beard also, except that he didn't have one.

THE WAR was furious and quick, and Prince Throdrexon lived up to all expectations. There was much marching and camping and passing of armies over mountains. Pitched battles were fought in narrow passes, in thick forests and in open fields. Baleful spells were cast and turned away by the sorcerers present, and great deeds were done with swords and shield. Prince Throdrexon attained victory in the end. He was the first over the walls of Baracenese when that citadel was toppled, and it was he who slew the traitorous lord of that place in single combat. The Duke laughed when a mere boy challenged him, and struck heavy strokes which always missed, until he exhausted himself and died from a quick thrust in the throat.

The name of Throdrexon was carried far in song and by herald, the Prince who *finished* the war not being quite the one who had started it. He was no longer the skinny youth who carried books around the court of Iankoros. He was broader across the shoulders, well muscled, and his face was tanned bronze by the sun. There was the faintest wisp of whiskers on his chin.

When eight months had passed and petty quarrels were resolved daily over the spoils of conflict, a messenger came from Iankoros to Prince Throdrexon.

"My Lord," said he. "Only now have I been able to catch up with your marches to deliver this news to you. I have chased after you for months."

"What news?"

"Your lady is with child."

Throdrexon bolted to his feet, at once barking orders to his men. They were to depart. Leaving a captain behind to haggle in his name over the loot, he went directly to his ship.

Swiftly he raced down the river Arrax, his ship alone. He sailed through the delta, past Nedek, the great port town, without stopping, heading straight for Iankoros. Always he stood on the deck, urging his oarsmen on, speaking spells to bring a better wind. The sails bulged. The mariners strained at their benches, and understood. No protest arose from them at all.

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At last the blessed sight for which he longed was before him—the open sea, and a dot upon it. The dot was Iankoros, and it grew hourly into an island. There was a haze over the water that day, making the outline of his home, when it became visible at all, very faint, indeed.

A son! He prayed to the gods of birth, and all the other lesser deities that favored him, that it would be a boy. A son and heir, to continue his line. At that moment the thought of an eighty-eighth prince almost made him whoop for joy. All the gold he had won in the wars meant very little just then.

They sailed a full day, with the island growing larger before them. Throdrexon's heart beat wildly. Already he imagined every step of the way up from the docks and along the roads, until at last he would come to the castle, enter over the drawbridge and the spike-filled moat, and come to the familiar courtyards once again. But he would not tarry to savor the sight of his home. At once he would go the rest of the way, up the stairs and through the golden doors of the marriage chamber. Already he could feel the stones in the road, the steps in the castle.

The sun sank with an orange splash as darkness crept starry-eyed over the world. The ship drew nigh the great, unscalable cliffs of Iankoros which had held her free from invasion throughout history, and the towering mass of the island kept them from the wind. The sails fell limp, and the sailors rowed all the harder, but still it seemed like hours as the circular wall of Iankoros turned slowly by them. Breakers crashed on the narrow beaches, and the helmsman strained to steer clear of them. Finally a rift appeared in the stern face of the island, the opening through which all ships sailed into Iankoros' only harbor. Carefully the vessel passed through the narrow channel, its mast dwarfed by the cliffs above, its oars almost touching stone on either side. They came to the still waters beyond, and when the guardsmen recognized the Prince's ship, they cheered and waved torches from their watchtowers.

Throdrexon could wait no longer. He stripped off his armor and weapons, laid aside his outer garments, and before the astonished eyes of his crew he leapt into the cold waters of the lagoon and swam with swift and heavy strokes to the quays. Equally startled boatmen helped him onto the docks, and when the sailors saw that he was there they cheered and relaxed and moored their ship at their leisure.

"Beloved! I am coming!" he bellowed into the night. Clad only in his lightclothes and shoeless, he ran with long strides over the hills and fields, along the pebbled roads, as a racer runs for a rich prize. Soon he saw lights and towers over the rolling slopes, and came to the gates of his own castle. At first the guard challenged this half naked and dripping one who came storming in out of the darkness, but then he saw the face and fell aside. Throdrexon's feet thudded across the drawbridge, padded over the flagstones within, and fell silently on thick carpets. Taking in three steps at a time he bounded up the stairway of the main hall, till finally, out of breath, he stood before the golden doors of Hamakara's chamber.

And there, shocking against the gold, were three women dressed all in black, weeping. A black banner on a pole leaned against the wall.

Throdrexon at first was completely bewildered. He did not react. His emotion left him and he stood there, gazing in wonder at these three figures of sorrow so inappropriately before the portals of joy.

"What does this mean?" he asked at last. "Why do you weep? Why is there not song and dance? Why do the bells not ring with merriment?"

Then a matron, whose face he recognized through her veil, stifled her tears and spoke.

"Alas, she is dead."

The words did not register. He was in a dream. The lady said again:

"My Lord, the Lady Hamakara is dead!"

He looked at their mourning dress, their tears, and the funeral flag beside them, and stood there like one struck dumb.

Then after a minute the words reached mind and heart.

"No! NO! NO!" He fell to the floor, pounded the boards with his fists, shrieked out short, hysterical, snarling screams. "No! She is not dead! She is not dead!"

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He lept up and burst through the doors.

"Beloved Hamakara! Speak to me! It is I!"

The marriage bed was empty. A wreath of flowers hung on one of the bedposts. The outburst over, he leaned against the doorway like a limp sack, and slid to the floor.

"And the child?"

Another of the women answered softly, and the other two burst into renewed tears.

"Never born."

"And the Lady? What became of her?"

"We could not leave her here any longer. All feared infection. Just this morning your teacher, the wizard Theremderis came to this room with many men. They took her beyond the Black Cliffs. They gave her a fine ship, laden with much treasure to buy off the boar-headed one. Oh Prince, she is in the under-earth now!"

The woman could say no more beneath her tears.

What was he doing with Hamakara now? What? Was he touching her?

THRODREXON LEFT the castle without a word. Still unprotected against the cold and the humours of the night, he ran the length of the island, to the Black Cliffs. There was nothing he could hope to see, empty sea, empty shore, the stars and the waves. He remembered this place from childhood. He had avoided it. Now he understood.

The sheer granite face dropped down into shadows, luminous white foam washing at the feet of the stone.

Throdrexon looked to the north, the evilest of directions where lay the realm of Rannon, and cried out in a loud voice:

"Rannon, you pig! Hear me tusked one! *You shall not have her!* Curse your name, *you shall not have her!*"

His voice boomed, startling sea birds from their perches in the cliff. The sea, which is sacred to Rannon, seemed to leap up in answer. Iankoros trembled.

A hand touched him on the shoulder. He whirled and beheld Zio Theremderis, whom he had not seen in many months. For once the sight was not welcome.

"*You!*"

"It is I. Calm yourself."

"Calm myself? How shall I calm myself after what you have done?"

Theremderis looked hurt.

"My Prince, what have I done?"

"*You gave her up!* You gave my bride to Rannon."

"Lord, she was dead. There was nothing I could do."

"*Nothing?*" The word was poison.

"Lord, a plague came to us. It was on the air, on the wind, in the sea, everywhere. Many died. Every precaution was taken for your Lady's safety. I personally exorcised her chambers every day, and her food was cleansed. I sealed her chambers with magic, but the sickness touched her and she succumbed. I wrestled with Rannon using all of my art, but he overcame me. Leechcraft, lore of books, spells, were to no avail. She died in a delerium, calling your name. I pray you, mourn now as is fitting, but do not rage against the inevitable. Come away now."

He put his hand on the Prince's arm, but was shaken off.

"I will not come away!"

"The night will do you ill."

Despite the chill, the Prince was streaming sweat.

"No! I must plan my campaigns against Rannon. I am successful in war, so they tell me. What do you know of my enemy? What ships does Rannon have, what catapaults? How many soldiers? Where are his fortifications and how might they be breached? *Tell me!*"

"I know not these things, Lord. No man goes into the lands of Rannon and returns with such intelligence. I simply do not know."

"Then I shall speak with someone who *does!*"

He ran off, and the aging wizard could not hope to catch him.

"Wait!" His voice was lost in the night.

Chapter 3: Throdrexon Conjures a Spirit in the Tower of Eagles

THE YOUTH'S heart was racing as he bounded up the winding stairs of the Tower of Eagles, taking in three and sometimes four in a stride. In no time at all he

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was at the top and through the trapdoor. He locked it behind him, and moved a trunk on top of it. He whispered a firespell and the torches in the walls flamed.

Calm was brought on by busy hands. He concentrated totally on what he was doing. Without hesitating, he began to clear away the tables and chairs, to pile the books in corners, until there was a wide empty space in the middle of the room.

Then he went to a cabinet, took from it several bottles and began his work. With the ashes of the mage Hinaris Tharalopos, the only one of all the ancients to escape the demands of the Lord of Death, he made a paste, and with it he drew a wide circle, fifteen cubits in diameter, on the smooth stones. All the while he spoke invocations to the spirit of Tharalopos, calling on that blessed one to aid him.

Within the circle he made a four pointed star, aligned with the cardinal directions, with the northern point blunted. He took ordinary chalk and wrote around the outside of that star the names of his eighty-six predecessors, the Sorcerer-Princes of Iankoros, going back to Mataris Zin and the beginning of the world. He spoke each name aloud. This was mostly formality, for all of the eighty-six were now slaves of Rannon. They could not help him.

Within the star he traced a triangle, again in the ash paste, and at the points he wrote the three virtues of the wizard: courage, knowledge and good will. Finally inside the triangle he drew a square, in ash, and wrote his own name in it.

All this completed, he stepped over what he had drawn, careful not to smear any of it, and put the bottle of ashes back on the shelf. He then took out from behind the loose stone the Scroll of Summoning, and with it under one arm he went again to the open cabinet and drew out incense burners which he placed at regularly spaced intervals around the circumference of the circle. No ordinary powder burned in them this night: in the first dried dragon's blood; in the second the sweat of the basilisk; in the third herbs from caves far under the sea; in the fourth the ears of a shadow; in the fifth the tongue of a mute serpent; in the sixth the claws of a tiger pulverized; and in the seventh the beard of a sage.

All was in readiness. He bolted all windows save one, that which opened to the skies of the north. He returned to the center of his drawings, stood in the square atop his own name, spread out the scroll on the floor and began his incantations. All this he had been trained to do many times. Some of it he had done before, some he had seen Theremderis do. But to do it all at once, in the proper order, so that it would have the desired effect, was something he had never seen. He concentrated.

Slowly, smoke rose from the burners, and the room filled with a musty haze. The torches seemed to dim a little. Throdrexon's voice droned on, going down the list of the named spirits and speaking their binding words, fishing like a man with a hook until he chanced upon some being passing near enough to the Earth to be touched by his spell.

Suddenly he felt a tingling; *he had one.* He glanced back at the list. The last name he had spoken was Gladziri, an ancient and powerful spirit, the bane of King Koslorvath of old and many less notable sorcerers that he had seized. Confidently he raised his arms and summoned Gladziri with the spell of the sheath, the spell of the anchor and the spell of the driven stake. Sudenly, he felt the freezing cold of Outer Space, as if he had reached deep into some enchanted ice water, far colder than anything known in the lands of men.

The pain was like burning.

And Gladziri came. At first the room was silent, and then there was a noise, a rustling like dead leaves, then a wind and the torches flickered. Throdrexon's hair blew about wildly. He could *feel* the presence of the demon, as only one with the talent for sorcery can. It pressed against him from all sides, hate-filled, furious. The ashes of Tharalopas stood like a wall against it.

And Gladziri spoke, invisible among the cavorting shadows..

"Well, maggot, you have summoned me. What do you want?"

"I am not a maggot but a man!" cried Throdrexon. "I am your master now!"

"You are an inexperienced wizard, which is all the better as far as I am concerned. Wiser ones usually know better than to argue in the precious seconds they

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have before I split open their skulls. And you are a maggot like all of your kind, a worm that crawls in the flesh of this planet, unable to move freely between the stars like all higher beings. Are you not afraid of me, maggot, worm, little hopping flea?"

"No, I am not afraid."

"Then watch this!"

The tower burst into flame. Books exploded in fire and fell from the shelves. Smoke filled the air, and the heat made sweat stream anew down the young man's body. The flames took to the floor, and burned across the stones, across the lines of ash and chalk and touched his legs.

Yet his clothing did not burn, and there was no pain. Not even the hairs on his legs were singed. He knew, as he had suspected, that the flames were an illusion. The demon withdrew them. The room was as it had been before.

There was a snarling outside, followed by shouts of alarm and screams. Then a scratching went up the outside of the tower, and the walls shook. Through the open window poured squirming, blood-red shapes that seemed to be all teeth and claws and lashing tails. They fell to the floor and plopped, like bags of jelly. They moved forward in a great mass, over the outer line of Throdrexon's defenses, and he was sorely tempted to drop everything and run. He could make it to the door and down the stairs; the creatures were slow. He could get away from those awful mouths—

Which was exactly what Gladziri wanted him to think. When one of the things drew close enough he kicked it and his foot passed right through without resistance. He held his ground. He knew that if he left the circle he would be smeared on the walls, and no piece of him bigger than a crab apple would ever be found. It had happened before to magicians who panicked. If he remained where he was, the demon could *not* touch him.

All the men he had slain in the war rose against him and cried for vengeance. He made no response, and they vanished.

"Enough!" He said the name of Gladziri's binding once more.

"You're good at this," said Gladziri. "Better than that one I had three nights ago. That was a sight!" Laughter resonated from the walls.

"Hear me!"

"Yes, I'll hear you. Speak your purpose. It grows late."

"I wish to know of Rannon, the Lord of Death."

"*Him?* Why do you care about that mad fool?"

"Why do you call him mad?"

"Every time I mash a wizard into little bits, Rannon comes along and collects the garbage. He alone of the Great Ones still dallies on this miserable little world, playing with maggots. The other gods have outgrown that sort of thing. Theirs are mature pursuits."

"What do you mean? Did not the gods die to redeem man, for a brief while at least, from Rannon, as is told in the *Song of the Stone?*"

"I don't care about your squealings, little one. We who feel the heartbeat of the universe don't read books. Is it not said that only a blind man or a cripple needs a cane? Well, you who are blind and crippled and hunchbacked and devoid of intelligence and manhood, listen to your betters for once and know that the gods of old did not die. They grew up and stopped playing mudpies. They don't care for mankind at all, save for the feebleminded Rannon who still delights in squashing you."

"Speak not with such contempt. I have power over you."

"Speak not with such arguments. You are a nuisance, like the bite of a mosquito, and that is all."

Throdrexon caught himself. He had begun to argue again, and at the end of the arguments Gladziri no doubt had laid a subtle trap. The creature was trying to play on his pride, now that his fear had proved of no use. He spoke firmly of his purpose, demanding straight answers.

"Tell me, Oh Gladziri who claims to know all, how one may enter into the lands of Rannon?"

"Was I summoned to answer *that?* Oh, leech in the crotch of a sick dog, step out of that circle and I'll help you to the place that Rannon holds. All you have to do is *die,* worm. It's very simple. Now dismiss me if you are through with your jabbering."

"I am not through."

"What, then?"

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"You have not answered my question."

"Yes I have, unless you haven't phrased it correctly, baboon. I assume you want to know how to enter the Land of the Dead while yet living, is that it? Do you have some silly scheme in mind to plague that degenerate? Even he does not deserve your kind, maggot."

"Get on with it."

"The wind and sea are servants to Rannon. Your little gods, who are scarcely better than you are, may send you a breeze occasionally, but Rannon sends the hurricane, and when he does he takes ships and seamen for his amusement. To the north beyond the ice wall, there is a vast cliff which marks the edge of the country of Rannon. There is an opening in that cliff, which may only be reached by sea. All funeral ships go there, bringing new toys to the idiot god. He has a son now, who is even worse. His name is Mnarim Yu, and he has no mind at all. You two should get along quite well."

"Tell more!"

"There are no good places in the underearth. Rannon cares not for the baubles you send him. Those whose bodies are destroyed he takes also in spirit, and he builds them new bodies, and when he's done they wish they had the old ones. On a road beneath the sea rides a black coach with no coachman, and this brings to Rannon all those who are not sent to him by boat."

"Is it possible to enter his realm undetected?"

"If you are brave and clever enough, and I doubt you are."

"Could I rescue one from that land?"

"You could carry her."

"Go now," Throdrexon said. "I am satisfied." He was triumphant. He had proven himself a mighty wizard, and his conjuring had been a success. He had gained knowledge that no other man had held before, and this knowledge told him that his plans could come to fruition. He could rescue Hamakara. *It could be done.* Never had his confidence been greater.

He leaped for joy and clapped his feet together in the air, and the very instant he did, a breath of sudden wind blew sending the Scroll of Summoning sailing across the room.

Horror replaced joy. The demon was still in the room.

"You forgot to say the word of unbinding, maggot! But no matter. Just go over there and pick up the scroll and *read* the word. No problem!"

Throdrexon almost lifted a foot. He was trapped, and he knew it. Death would come instantly if he stepped beyond the names of his ancestors, and the name of the wizard who had escaped Rannon.

"Only á little formality," crooned Gladziri. "Come on."

He shouted every word of unbinding he could think of.

"Sorry, wrong one."

The parchment rose in the air, and Throdrexon glimpsed for an instant two long, thin, gastly white hands holding it, and then the Scroll of Summoning was rent into a thousand tiny pieces, and scattered in the air.

The torches went out, and Gladziri raged around the room in a whirl of wind and smoke, laughing. He upset tables and cabinets, tore shelves from the walls, shattered bottles and jars. He swirled dust and debris and wore it like a cloak. He hurled the incense burners at the hapless magician one by one and the tower shook with his mirth. Other things he threw, until a steady bombardment of objects flew into the circle. Gladziri could not enter the circle, but a stone could, a book could, a bone could.

Throdrexon had no shield, and the projectiles struck him out of the blind dark. There was no defense, no dodging. Gladziri didn't need light to aim by.

Something cracked on the Prince's skull and he fell to the floor, vaguely aware of blood running down his face. He huddled in the middle of the square, his head between his legs, his arms around his knees. Gladziri took stones out of the walls and hurled them, and one broke a shoulder, another a knee. The demon removed loose stones, the ones with things hidden behind them; there were a fearful amount of secrets hidden in the Tower of Eagles, and the evil spirit found them all.

In a desperate attempt to keep hold of consciousness and mind, Throdrexon began to recite lines from the *Song of the Great Stone.* Thinking about the deeds of

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those gods and heroes, he saw a falseness in them, a wishful thinking on the part of men. The gods would not protect men. There was no hope. He fully expected to die, and at times he hoped to die—he would rejoin Hamarkara—but he did not. Finally the shower of missles let up, the torches came back on, and a kindly, familiar voice spoke.

"All is well. Come out of the circle now."

He looked up. Only one eye seemed to be working, and through a haze he saw Zio Theremderis, just beyond the edge of the outer circle.

"Come out," said the wizard. "I have banished the demon. Let's leave this wretched place."

"Oh, teacher! I cannot move!" And this was true. Both legs and both arms were broken.

Theremderis hesitated, and said again, "Come to me," but he would not cross the curved line of ash paste. Throdrexon sobbed in despair, for he realized then that this was not Theremderis at all, but Gladziri, torturing him with hope.

The lights went out again; a piece of board slammed into his face and he knew no more. The spirit did not seem to realize that the Prince was unconscious. Perhaps it did not fully understand what it meant to have flesh. Still it persisted with screams and yells, foul stenches, threats, curses and an endless array of shocking apparitions.

At last dawn came, and the sunlight banished Gladziri as no wizard could. Throdrexon felt someone touch him gently, and he rose into semi-consciousness, babbling more lines from the *Song of the Stone*. Slowly sight returned to him and he saw above him the face of Theremderis, the true Theremderis, who had crossed the ash lines on the floor.

"Teacher?"

Theremderis surveyed the ruins around him.

"A mighty conjuring was this."

"I had Gladziri."

"But he tricked you and you could not dismiss him. Consider yourself lucky that you still breathe! I could not help you last night. I could not enter and face Gladziri unprotected. And even now I shall have to exorcise this room thoroughly, lest he return again and again to haunt it until the ending of time."

Throdrexon heard nothing more. He half voiced the name of Hamakara as the wizard carried him away.

Chapter 4: A Year in Bed

Throdrexon spent most of his nineteenth year in bed. At first, when his life hung like a spider's silk before stormy winds, only the aged wizard tended him. Theremderis took the Prince when he was but a battered lump of flesh and bones. He carried him down out of the tower and he tended him. With the saying of spells and with leechcraft he tended him, and with medicines and the making of splints, and with patience and forgiveness and hope. The Prince's soul was burnt by exposure to the spirit, for the spirit is of colors that no eye can see, and of smells that no nose can sense, and it exists in more dimensions than three. And from it, all that is mortal and earthbound must recoil as from raging fire. Wizards are aware of this danger, dismissing spirits quickly whenever they can.

A special magic drew the poisons out. Theremderis took his Lord to a wide room with open shutters overlooking the southward sea, and he blessed that room and called fair humours into it. But still the recovery was slow, and for weeks and weeks the youth lay in delerium screaming strange names and words. Like a rare and intricate glasswork smashed by a hammer, he lay in ruin. Theremderis built him back up slowly with secrets only he knew, but he could not hurry nature in the mending of bones. He could speak the true names of those bones and gain power over them, commanding a thing to grow again strong and straight, but the slowness of that growth, and the sharp flashes of pain that came whenever the youth moved, were things he could not control.

All the isle knew that some peril had befallen their Prince, but no word came from the castle. All had seen the lights in the tower that night of the conjuring, and all had felt the earth shake beneath their feet, and yet these things were officially denied. Rumor flew where report did not, telling to one how the Prince was dead, to another

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how he was mad, to yet another how his sorceries had left him marvellously and hideously transformed, so that his lower body was like that of a beast. There was mourning in every house, not because men loved the Prince so much as they defined themselves in terms of him. He was their anchor in the sea of history. They were subjects of the descendant of the second son of the first King the world ever knew, whose line was unbroken and pure. For the Prince to be dead, to be mad, or to have no heir, meant that they were set adrift and lost.

One day Throdrexon sat up in his bed and called for Zio Theremderis. He was pale and wasted, his muscles gone through dissuse, his skin stretched tight over his bony chest, his eyes sunken and not quite focussed. Still he spoke and gave his command, and the wizard came. Then was a herald sent among the people saying, "The Prince is well," and there was rejoicing in every town. Bells rang and men danced for joy in the street, and the noise of the celebration came even to Throdrexon's chamber.

"What's all the clamor?" he asked.

Later, when he was able to remain upright without pain, and his arms and hands would obey him, albeit stiffly, he called for books to be brought to him. At first he read only light verse, then travel tales, then romances and other pleasant things of no import. But as his strength grew and his mind awakened to its sorrows, the Prince turned again to the study of magical lore. Theremderis saw this and tried to direct his readings, to give him a balanced picture of things. He brought him also treatises on the political arts, and lectured him in the ways of ruling, but the young man paid scant attention.

"Please listen, My Lord," said the wizard. "Remember that my regency will last now only until you are well, and then it is you who will give all the orders. When that happens I hope to be able to rest some."

"Right now I don't care much for ruling," said Throdrexon.

"It is your duty to the high station in which you were born. If you don't, then wicked men will use you as a puppet, and you will have betrayed yourself and your people. They will wear you like a glove. There are innumerable examples of this sort of thing in the chronicles."

"Pray don't recite them all now."

"Just remember that it is through neglect that dynasties end."

"Perhaps the lords of those dynasties had other interests."

"Usually the chopping block. They found themselves there."

The Prince gazed idlely out the window, and the wizard grew stern.

"You must be worthy of your name, and defend your throne against all contenders. *Do you understand?*"

"Yes, yes. I understand."

"I hope you find a woman soon. After what you have been through, you should not sit in your great hall alone."

"I fully intend to find a woman. Yes, a wife. I have thought of little else."

Theremderis knew what he really meant and he was afraid. The boy—he could never think of him as anything but a boy—had not given up on Hamakara. It was the mark of his house, and had been seen in his father and his grandfather. He was stubborn, and would be led either to triumph or disaster through his stubbornness.

The Prince, awash in a sea of pillows and tiny among them, reached under the sheets and drew out a large and ancient book, bound in leather with jewel bestudded boards and closed with an iron hasp. Theremderis knew of it. It was the *Great-book of Thamalamach'in*, known among the learned as the *Book of Life*.

"Profound reading you have there, My Lord. Where did you get it?"

"My serving man fetched it for me. He was so afraid of your curses that he would not go unless I mumbled a few words over him to protect him. I recited a laundry list."

"I shall afflict him with the pox!"

"Pray, don't!" the Prince laughed. "It was all my fault, and I have already read the book."

"Well, the pupil has looked ahead many lessons into the future. He would know what the master knows."

"Will you explain it to me?"

"I have little choice. It is better for you to know these things in their fullness than to half understand them and think you know all. A wizard and a prince cannot live by

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false notions."

The old man drew up a chair beside the bed, and together the old eyes and young scanned the *Book of Life*, and questions were asked and answered. Theremderis was amazed by the depth of the Prince's mind. He thought with relief that Throdrexon could handle all these secrets and no harm would come to him, but when they came to the final chapter of the book, which tells the truth about the first days of the world and the coming of Rannon, he was again disturbed.

"Teacher," asked the youth. "Why are these falsehoods included here?"

"They are not falsehoods, My Lord."

"I do not understand."

"Perhaps then we should stop. The *Greatbook of Thamalamach'in* was not meant to be pursued in a day."

"I have already studied it long. Tell me this, at least. Is it true that the gods did not die to redeem men from Rannon and to buy them life with their blood? Did they really just abandon us?"

"They did."

"Why was I taught otherwise?"

"All men are taught so. The truth of the matter would drive them mad, or at least make them immoral."

"How so?"

"If it is known that there is no hope in this life and no mercy in the next, and that Rannon cannot be bought off with gifts, men will say to themselves, 'Why should we obey moral law? What good is it when good men and evil are alike tortured forever in the underearth?' Then they will say that the law is no good at all, and they will abuse others, take what they want, and kill when they take a fancy to. They will serve Rannon in this."

"But they have a point, don't they? Philosophically, at least."

"What good is philosophy when there is no happiness? The purpose of morality is to make men happy in this life, and to keep the peace. There is no joy beyond this life, so this is the only chance we have. If a lie serves this end, then a lie should be told. Truth is not sacred."

Throdrexon lay back and pondered this. The last person he ever expected to belittle truth was Theremderis, and yet he had just done so.

"Is it also true," he asked after a pause, "that the Great Gods abandoned mankind out of contempt or disinterest?"

"Alas, this is true. They care nothing for us, and left us to fend for ourselves against Rannon. Only the lesser gods remain on the Earth and they have no power over Death. They fear Rannon as we do."

"Gladziri said that."

"Why should he have lied? Higher beings have no concern for such matters."

"He also mentioned something else, and I have been thinking about this for a long time." The Prince brushed the hair out of his eyes, and looked straight at the wizard. He spoke slowly, carefully formulating each word. "He said that to the North, near the edge of the Earth or beyond it, there is an entrance to the underearth in a high cliff. He said that this is a real place, and that all the funeral ships in the world go there."

"The land of the dead is no figure of speech," said Theremderis. "There is such a place. We never bury anyone in Iankoros so that they might go there. It is said that those who go to Rannon in spirit alone suffer even greater pains."

"Would it not be possible then, supposing just for the sake of an argument that someone cared to try it, to go alive into the underearth and to snatch someone from that place, and then by magic to restore them to life again?"

So that was it! The elder man's face filled with rage. He rose from his seat and snatched the book from the Prince's hands.

"*No!* It is not possible! It should never be attempted! It could never be done! Is Rannon a fool?"

"Gladziri said he was."

"My Lord, Hamakara is dead forever! Forget her! Put aside such schemes."

Throdrexon let out a wail at the name, and Theremderis felt his pain. He saw the need for calm and rational explanation He reseated himself.

"Consider, My Lord," he said, "the ways of battle, in which you are so skilled. The soldiers form a shield wall against the enemy, so that all might protect the other, and move in a mass which cannot be broken. But if one rash fellow seeks glory or something equally in vain, and breaks from the

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shield wall to run into the ranks of the foemen, what do they do? They laugh and cut him to pieces, then try and force their way through the hole he has created in his own line. Nothing is gained and all are imperilled. Likewise, if a city is beseiged by overwhelming numbers, and the defenders come out from the walls to offer open battle, the invaders only strike them down. In life, mankind is beseiged by Rannon and behind our shield wall we can hold him off for only a little while. In that while we do our deeds, sing our songs, and share a little bit of joy. That is all. If we strive for more than that we lose everything. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, I understand."

"Good. It was a foolish thing you said on the spur of the moment. Think no more on it."

Theremderis left him, but was deeply troubled. The Prince did not forget such things, and he brooded long. He read incessantly in the books of the ancients, searching for the way to the lands of Rannon. There were no maps, but there were hints, and tales of dreams, and visions, and he tried to put these together like beads on a string. He considered the warning of Theremderis, but twisted his words. True, an army could not march into the underearth, but what about a single man, moving alone by stealth like a thief in the night?

Chapter 5: He Begins His Journey

When Prince Throdrexon was twenty, his time of waiting was over. Behind him at last were the long months of secret necromancies, the probings, the failures, the experiments with animals; dogs, cats, birds and even a horse he had called back from unlife into life, and he knew as well as anyone could the techniques for restoring flesh to bones, for breathing breath back into the dead.

Still, no human corpses had been available to him. All Iankoros were sent to Rannon on the day of their dying. This was the tribute the Dark Lord demanded, and this was the payment made. Much was yet unknown.

One day in early autumn he commanded his leather-maker to sew him two bags, one small and ordinary, such as a cobbler might use to carry his tools. The other was wider and longer.

He bade the man come to him in the darkest hour of the night with the bags, paid him duly, swore him to secrecy by a terrible oath and then sent him away wondering.

Just before dawn he broke his fast and took up his sword, Dran. After donning sword belt and thick jerkin, winter leggings and heavy mail, a fur cape and a polished war helm, he wrapped the larger sack about himself, in the way a soldier carries a blanket. Sweating from the weight of the overdress, he took the smaller bag in hand and left the castle by a secret door.

The night air was cool to his face, but still he was hot. He walked to an orchard nearby and filled the smaller sack with fruit. It was the harvest season, and ripe apples, cherries, peaches and pears hung from the branches in great abundance.

This done he set off for the Black Cliffs. The eastern sky was beginning to glow when he got there. The sea was still dark, the thin line of the continent still invisible in the gloom. Below, feeble breakers bathed the rocks. The tide was half way out. Above, the stars slowly faded.

Perspiring even more beneath the load of fruits, Throdrexon made his way down the narrow, pebble-strewn path that led by the side of the cliff to the beach. He descended and set the bag and his cloak down on the sand. He untied his jerkin down the front, flapping it to let cool air in. Sweat dried on his body and he felt a slight chill. He relaced the strings, then got to work.

He searched the shoreline until he found three perfect clam shells, and then he laid them end to end in the sand with a twig standing upright between the first and second shell. He gathered from beyond the high tide level heaps of dried kelp into a great pile, said a word over it, snapped his fingers and a fire started. When it was burning brightly he took a wooden disc out of his pocket, a trinket coin, cast it into the flames and called upon Ctharan Ctho, whose voice is the wind. Also he invoked the lesser got Yoth, the patron of Iankoros and her seamen. He lied to them about his purpose.

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"Friends, accept this offering. I wish to go fishing today, far out at sea where the whales ride. Send me a wind, and I will catch it."

Almost at once, a breeze began to blow out of the south, stirring the sand and seaweed along that narrow beach. Throdrexon took an enchanted rope and bound the wind with it. Again there was stillness. He laid the knotted rope on the ground. He threw another coin into the fire.

"I thank you for the wind. Now send me a boat swifter than any made by hands."

He watched the seashells expectantly. Suddenly there was a noise, distant, like the thundering of waters far away, and it came nearer, changed to a rustling, a pounding. A cloud of sand rose into the air, whirling over the shells like a cape. Dimly through the dust he could see them grow and change and grow some more. As big as shields they were, longer than swords, wide enough for a man to sit in them. The three fused and became one, and their sides rose and curled. The twig joined their substance and grew tall.

When all was done a golden boat lay at the water's edge, ten cubits in length, with a mast standing two-thirds of the way forward, and strange runes carved upon the bow. A sail hung limp in the twilight air, woven of silver threads.

"I name you *Water Dove,*" he said to the boat, and in that naming he took command of it.

He threw another coin into the fire, and called upon Annan Larin, the protector of lovers.

"Help me find my beloved," he said.

There was no immediate reply.

He now placed the rope, the bag and the cloak in the bottom of the boat and pushed the craft out beyond the breakers, till the sea came to his thighs. Then he climbed aboard, loosened the knot in the rope a little and the sail filled with wind. He took the tiller in hand and steered to the north. Iankoros was left behind in darkness.

By the time the sun was fully up, he was near to the shores of the Amyrthelian mainland, and to his left he saw low marshes filled with reeds, rising lands covered with forests beyond and blue, haze-masked mountains in the distance. He knew those lands and those trees. The wood was called Turyin, and he had fought battles there.

By midmorning the Dawnview Hills passed, and with them the Watcher's Hall and the last of Amyrthel's eastern arm. Blue sea stretched unbroken ahead.

Noon came, and with it hunger. Throdrexon ate a single apple from his hoard, then spoke aloud the secret name of the salmon's binding, and almost instantly a fish leapt over the gunwhale and lay squirming in the bottom of the boat. He rose from his feet, stretched his cramped legs and stomped on the fish once, very hard. He then spoke the words to command fire, and a ball of fire materialized out of the air, an inch above the salmon. Grease ran in the bottom of the *Water Dove.* When the fish was cooked, he sent the fire away, ate what he wanted and tossed the rest to the gulls, who didn't need summoning by any hidden words.

Many hours passed, and the sun was hot, the sky clear. He went over in his mind the lines to a poem he was composing, called *The Celebration of Hamakara.* He spoke aloud the words, and when one did not sound right, when it seemed to break the rhythm of a line, or just vaguely seemed not to fit, he went back and changed it. Slowly, like a glacier sliding down out of the mountains, the poem grew.

So died the day, and he called another fish out of the sea in the twilight. It was almost dark when he passed the Isle of Nradius, the land of merchants. Once he drew near to a heavily laden galley, lumbering home from some distant port. He did not wish to be seen, and drew a cloak of shadow about himself. He was not seen, even though he got so close to the ship that he could hear the coarse jokes the sailors were telling. They had come a long way and were glad to be back to their island. Someone was waiting for each of them. Throdrexon wished them well, and soon the lights of the vessel fell behind in the night and the island itself along with them.

He awoke the next morning to find the sun already risen, and a flat, straight coastline to the west again, very far away. He wasn't entirely sure where he was, and saw only leagues and leagues of white sandy

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beaches and pine forests, unchanging through the hours. He loosened the knot on the rope a little, gaining speed. The monotony continued. He looked for landmarks and saw none. He knew this was still Amyrthel, but he wasn't sure how far he had gone while he slept, how far north he was. The air was slightly chilly, the sky still clear.

He wove more words into his song, and sailed on.

Morning came to the third day, and it was still twilight when sleep left the Prince. The land was now very close. In the distance, beyond the trees and hills, there stood upright like a marble spear a white tower, thin, tall, windowless and without battlements. He had come a long way indeed, and the recognition was an uneasy one.

He had read of this land, and that tower, built of old by the wizard Mlorim, who caused time to slumber around him, while he and seven champions lay on beds of flame awaiting the horns that shall sound the world's last day. He had also read of the pirate king Omniri who had been cast up on those shores and sought treasure there. Omniri found strange, white flowers growing in the darkest parts of the wood, crowded thicker and thicker as he drew near the tower. The pirate grew weary, and in the end he lay down among the flowers and slept, and never woke again. Throdrexon wasn't sure he believed the story—how could it have been reported?—but he had no intention of trying to disprove it. He steered out to sea, giving Mlorim's realm wide berth. He loosened the wind-rope yet more, careful not to untie it all the way, lest the wind escape.

The young Prince knew that in the night he had passed the mouth of the river Thanic, where maps ended and marvels began, and marvels indeed there were.

The shape of the land began to change, the gentle beaches giving way to fearsome rocks and towering cliffs. The coasts were rough, impossible to beach a boat upon. He noticed that there were no gulls in those rocks. He called them by the name of their clan, and none came. He called the fishes, and there were none. It was very silent, the world deserted out of some fear. Cautious and in dread, Throdrexon continued on his course, and around noon he came to the City of Gog, called the Terror of the Night. It was horrible enough in broad daylight.

And it was just as well that the inhabitants of that place hid from the sun. Gog was not a human city, and the dwellings of the builders were squat and broad, carved of stone blacker than a madman's thoughts. On the towers, walls and rooftops of the houses were huge, lifelike images of human faces, the faces of those murdered in midnight wanderings, faces that seemed to be alive. Even while their masters slept they screamed. They moaned, their lips flapping like limp ebon flags. There were no words, only a wild, painful cacaphonous clamor. No minds, only fear.

Throdrexon turned away from this sight. Surely, he thought, these builders were the kin of Rannon, his allies after his own likeness, upon whom he smiled. There was much of the mind of that god in this design.

He loosed the rope all he dared, and the *Water Dove* leapt over the sea, the City of Gog falling swiftly behind.

There was no peace all that day, for unnatural sight followed unnatural sight. Shapes rose out of the sea and sank again, twisted things larger than the great whales, things half like men, half like nothing known to man. Once he glanced to the east and saw atop a lonely rock the castle of Tyan Brath, and when he sailed past it without coming near he was very glad. Sailors told of it and philosophers dismissed the idea, yet there it was, real and true, built not of stones at all, but tier upon tier of blind eyes, gaping immortally down the endless eons. No one knew its origin. Thylaxis Urturnhur listed it in his *Natural Things* as one of the nine great anomalies in the world.

In the Straits of Han, serpent-women lounged in the shallow waters, twitching their tails and singing alluring songs. The Prince sang his own song back at them, the song of his beloved, drowning out their words. By this strength and the wind of Ctharan Ctho, he passed by the creatures unharmed and emerged from the straits, into the Northern Sea beyond.

Night came, and with it bitter cold.

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Throdrexon put on the fur cape he had bought. Above, the constellations looked less and less familiar. Far to the south, where the sky touched the sea, he spied the upraised hand of the Summer Hunter, and he could still see all of the Necklace, but that was all.

On the morning of the fourth day the sea was rough and white-capped, the sky overcast, and there was a touch of frost in the air. Breathing puffs of white mist, Throdrexon spoke words and conjured up another fireball, this time for warmth, but his teeth still chattered. There was ice on the tiller, making it hard to operate. Flurries of snow fell off and on, and the world was grey and blank and quiet.

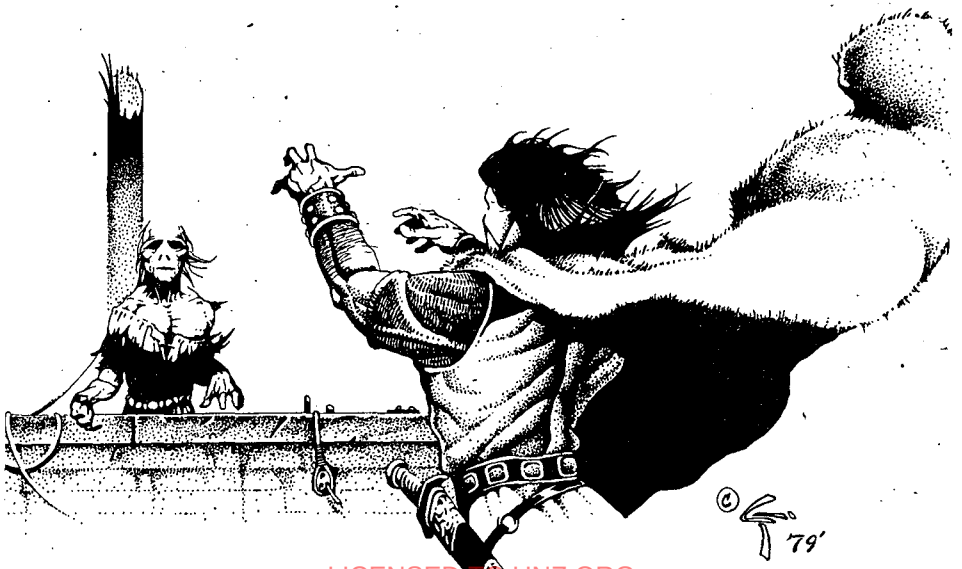
He could not see the sun to tell time, but the day was well in progress when he sighted the other vessel. At first it was little more than a speck bobbing up and down in the clouded distance, but the details finally resolved themselves. As it neared, he saw a black longboat with a black sail, and there were folds of brightly colored cloth hung over the sides instead of shields. It was the funeral ship of a wealthy man, not royalty, not a warrior. Probably a trader. There was the emblem of some house hung on the bow, but Throdrexon did not recognize it.

He steered the *Water Dove* in the direction of the deathship, tightening the knot of the enchanted rope until Ctharan Ctho's wind blew no more, and only the natural breeze filled the sail. He matched speeds with the low black vessel, and drew up alongside.

By standing up, he could see over the gunwhale of the ship. In the middle of the deck lay an old man, thin and white-haired, surrounded by sealed jars, gold and fine silks. He had been at sea for some time, for his flesh was already blue-black and beginning to shrivel, his face pecked eyeless by the gulls.

The Prince saw the man as an opportunity to practice his art. He didn't know the dead one or care about him, but he was glad to see him. Here at last was a human specimen to work with.

He cast aside his cloak despite the cold, raised his arms apart, and began a long series of incantations, memorized long before from the *Greatbook of Thamalamach'in* and many times rehearsed. He spoke all the hidden words designating the parts of the body, and called on the lesser gods associated with love, comfort, life and healing. He held light in his voice and balanced it against the darkness of Rannon.



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He commanded the flesh to grow again upon the bones, to cover the face once more. He drew the lips back from the curled grin. He bound the tissues of the man with his words and his will, and muscles and sinews did renew themselves, and the bare cheekbones were covered over. He spoke the hidden name of sight, gaining power over the eyes of the man, and called them back into their sockets. He spoke words of strength and healing while the two vessels rose and fell on the rough sea, and the corpse was strengthened and healed.

And yet there was no breath in it.

Throdrexon called upon Time:

"Madha Kanil with the thousand faces, who gave us evening and morning, give back the evenings and mornings of this man!"

And he spoke the true name of Time, a secret known only to a few sorcerers and hoarded by them, and he spoke it aloud until the earth and the air could hear it, and Time was bound. The Prince could vaguely sense that some of the dead man's hours had been fetched from the Storehouse of Things Past beyond the edge of the world, and were now hovering overhead. Still there was no breath, so he addressed the winds, turning to the south, the west, and the east, calling on them thus:

"Oh winds of the pure directions, hear the word of the one who holds your names. Breathe, winds, into this flesh, into the nostrils of this man so that he may live, and stand up on his feet again. *Breathe* so that he may know the rising and setting of the sun once more. *Breathe* so that he may raise a rousing shout. *Breathe* so that he may walk again in his own land. *Breathe* into him, O winds, as I have commanded you. I speak your names!"

He spoke then the names of the winds not allied with Rannon, the winds of the west and south and east, and they roared upon him, raising great waves, shredding the sail of the funeral ship, pulling the *Water Dove* away. Throdrexon had to grapple with the winds, and master them, before he could continue. He channelled them into the man, but still the sea leaped and the two vessels shook. The mast of the black ship snapped and fell into the sea. The winds scattered the dead man's clothing and his treasure.

They breathed into him, and his lungs were filled.

He rose to his feet.

"I have done it!" cried Throdrexon to no one. He waved his hand and the winds ceased, and the sea was still. In silence he watched as the old man walked slowly to the railing of his ship and faced the Prince.

He waited, but there was no word from the other.

"Hail, friend!" he called out, and there was no response. The man's face was completely blank, his eyelids closed.

"Awake!" He spoke the word to banish sleep, and the eyes did open, and there was terror beneath the lids. The man swayed from side to side, all coordination gone from arms and legs, hands waving like a puppet out of control.

"Speak!"

His jaw dropped open, and he spoke. "Gggaaaahhhh! Ghaaaahh!" He leaned forward, went limp, and toppled into the sea, and the Prince realized that he had never been truly alive. Something was wrong; something was missing. He would have to study more. That was the only hope. He would find out what had not been there.

Exhausted he slumped down by the tiller, untied the rope a little, and in a short while the empty, broken ship was gone. He was alone again, with a jumble of emotions. He tried to add lines to *The Celebration of Hamakara* but could not. The words wouldn't come.

It would be no smiling bride that he brought back to Iankoros.

Chapter 6: The Shores of the Underearth

In the end it came to this: the air was damp and cold, the snow no longer falling, and the shadow of Rannon stretched over the sea. The stars peered down occasionally through the ragged clouds, strangers in their own sky. The sun was not seen at all, only the scant glow of it firefly-lighting the southern horizon.

Prince Throdrexon had come to the end of the ocean, and the Mountains of the World's Edge loomed up before him, holding the waters from the abyss beyond. He

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huddled at the stern of the *Water Dove*, forever commanding the ice to be gone from the joint in the tiller. No longer did he conjure fires for warmth. They only went out and he didn't want to waste his strength. He was far from his home isle, and his powers were weak.

The earthwind was a frigid blast against him, and he untied his own wind as much as he dared. The boat moved very slowly, the mountains ahead dwarfing the craft to the size of an insect and smaller. They stood terrible in the grey twilight, snow-capped and ice-sheathed, entertaining no beaches. The waves of the sea crashed against the eternal feet of the peaks.

Funeral ships were all about now, all heading in the same direction as if by instinct. Throdrexon could see three or four of them at any time, any way he looked, and some of them were quite close. He had a mad thought—what if Hamakara's vessel was among them. It was only the torture of fate when he did spy a craft of Iankorosian make, for it was not hers. No, the rescue of her would not be so simple.

The cliffs claimed their share of Rannon's tribute. By sheer strength of arm, by his rudder, by the might of his bound wind, Throdrexon was able to draw away from them, but two or three of the unpiloted barges, the larger, clumsier ones, did not. He saw them splintered on the rocks, their treasures dumped into the hoard of the sea, their corpses left bobbing in the foam.

How many days had it been? Six? Seven? Ten? Once the darkness came he had lost track of time. Had the faint light to the south appeared a few times while he slept? When he awoke to see a trace of orange, he was never sure how long it had been there, and the fading was so gradual that he could not perceive the moment the day, if such a thing could be called day, ended. Still he knew that he had almost reached his destination. He sailed along the ultimate rim of the ocean and the world until he came to an opening in the rocks, and for a moment it reminded him of the guarded harbor of Iankoros. He made his way through the tangles of blindly drifting funeral ships and into the still waters beyond where all similarity between his holding and that of this other prince ended.

It was not a harbor but an immense cavern, so huge that he could not see all its walls and much of its ceiling. In all directions, rotting masts and abandoned hulks stuck out of the water, decks awash and still laden with gold which meant nothing to Rannon.

He knew this place. It was the Death Cave, from which no ship ever exited.

The air was bitterly cold, and chunks of ice floated among the debris and corpses. There were thousands of corpses. The place was solid with them, and the prow of the *Water Dove* pushed them aside as it passed. Throdrexon tightened his windrope all the way, and his sail went slack. He let himself drift until he came to a tiny inlet at the side of the cave. There he moored his craft and disembarked, taking with him his war helm, his sword, Dran, and the two leather bags. He found a narrow ledge and followed it around the semi-circular wall of the cavern until he came to a wide beach.

There were bodies on the sand, piled there layer upon layer by a tide obedient to Rannon. These were all the world's slain, all the victims of disease and the malice of chance, all those who had known terror in the night and no morning after, folk of all races, all lands, all ages. Many were maimed hideously, limbs twisted in all ways that could bring agony. The Prince walked among them, stepping over a dark-hued Bantarian who held his head in frozen fingers, a maiden whose eyes had been gouged out by torturers, a blue baby, what might have once been a boy, an old man shriveled like a dead leaf. He went twenty cubits before he saw a dim shape perched against the back of the cavern, another twenty before the details became clear.

It was a toad-thing, as massive as an elephant, sitting atop a stone stool. In its curiously human hands it held a flute the length of a cavalry lance.

The figure stirred, freezing Throdrexon in unexpected terror.

It began to play, and he trembled at the sound.

The dead moved. Dimly, without intelligence or feeling they propped themselves up on shattered elbows, on legs lacking feet, and they stood up upon the beach, many leaning on the others, some carried as if by the command of the hypnotic tune

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which filled the Death Cave unto its shadowed roof. They trudged out of the sea and onto the sand, forming a rough line. The notes changed slightly and they shuffled stiffly into the mouth of a tunnel behind the piper. Throdrexon joined them, pulling his cloak around tightly to cover his armor and sword.

In a minute he was in absolute darkness. There was no light in the tunnel, and the dead made their way by instinct, or by a command unfelt by the living. Throdrexon placed a hand on a cold, dry shoulder before him, allowing himself to be led. The stench of putrid flesh filled the air like a solid thing, and the company moved deeper and deeper into the Kingdom of the Dead. After a while a low moan, almost a whimper, arose from the multitude. Throdrexon's heart beat faster and faster. He knew Hamakara had gone through this, and was down below somewhere. She was one of these slaves, and Rannon had her.

What was he doing with her now?

The way grew more damp, and mud dripped from the walls. The tunnel bottlenecked at spots where decayed flesh was pressed upon decayed flesh and rammed into Throdrexon's face as all of them crowded through. And it was especially in such places that the imps came, little unseen creatures chattering among the legs of the prisoners, squealing insults, stripping bites of flesh from whatever they could grab. Something bit into the Prince's ankle and he cursed and kicked it off. He dearly wanted to speak a light-spell, then draw Dran and put an end to this, but he knew better. He had to wait, to go as far as he could undetected, or all was lost.

The man in front of him, whose shoulder he had been grasping, went down. Bones crunched, but there was no cry.

After a time there was a faint noise ahead which grew louder and filled the passage, like the speech of the god of earthquakes, like the pounding of a thousand waters, the voices of all the Earth's millions raised in torment. It throbbed in Throdrexon's ears and he could not shut it out. He felt that he would faint. He found himself mouthing the words to a spell which would make him deaf, and halted. He bit his tongue, and the pain made him concentrate. He needed all his awareness now, all senses.

The tunnel widened into an open place, another courtyard or cavern, and Throdrexon was no longer pressed from all sides. There was room to move about, although the stench was the same.

Also there was light. Tapers atop brass posts ringed the cave walls. At the other end, barely visible in the shadows, was a massive gate, white and smooth, as if carved from a single, impossible piece of bone. On either side of this were pedestals, and atop them serpent-headed lions armed with glowing irons.

The dead milled about aimlessly until one came beneath the twin beasts. A serpent mouth spoke:

"I give you the gift of pain, the blessing of my master."

An inhuman throat chuckled. A human one screamed. The heated rod touched flesh, branding forever the seal of Rannon.

The bone gate was opened, and the dead man was admitted.

Another came, and another, and another. Throdrexon held back from the crowd, unsure of what to do. For the moment no one was coming down the tunnel, and the cave was growing empty.

Still hesitant, he found himself the last person in the room. Four eyes glared at him.

"You too!"

He imitated the listless walk as best he could, slowly wandering over to the two creatures, almost as if he hadn't heard them. They stuck their irons in their mouths, and hissed. They drew them out again, bright red. They reached down to touch Throdrexon, and just as they did he threw his cape open, and Dran flew from the scabbard.

"Brother! This one is still alive!" cried an astonished serpent face, and Dran answered swiftly. Two monstrous heads lay snapping at the dirt, apart from their bodies. They did not bleed.

Suddenly more dead men emerged from the tunnel, and the cave began to fill again. Throdrexon turned to them and shouted, "Turn back! You're free!"

They did not turn back; they made no response at all, and the Prince saw how foolish he had been. He wasted no more time with them, pried the gate open with

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the blade of Dran, and entered the Underearth unmarked.

At the first sight of the place he reeled, almost lost his footing. He found himself atop a high cliff, looking down over dark valleys and naked hills, stretching as far as the eye could see. Dirty grey clouds hung overhead, and an unseen source provided a kind of twilight glow. He could just barely see as he made his way down the steep hillside, but he saw more than enough of the nature of the land. On ledges and in nooks there were people suffering every kind of agony, engaged in every kind of madness. He climbed on down without pause, past a man bound ever to weave tapestries out of the flesh of his loved ones while they still lived, past one who screamed and writhed beneath a mass of serpents while some insane command bade him tie buttons to their tails. Even as Throdrexon went by, this one swelled up and burst with a watery pop, splattering gore and venom, and as the Prince drew away his bones and organs slowly began to reconstitute themselves, while the vipers gathered for another assault. He stopped and stared and almost burst into tears at the sight of a little girl perpetually gnawed by graveworms which never seemed done their feasting. She lay still and only whimpered, but the pain was in her eyes. The worms had not reached her eyes yet, though the rest of her face was gone.

Throdrexon came to the bottom of the cliff and set out over the ashen countryside. He saw all the world's dead about him, all the great kings, all the soldiers, all the beggars, all the babies that died before they were named. All of them were tormented without reason, without deference for rank or character, with no concern for who they were and who they had been, good and evil tortured alike—not out of punishment or reward, for punishment and reward were unknown here. It was all the sport of Rannon and nothing more.

Throdrexon thought ever of Hamakara as he topped bloodstained hills, waded through screaming masses no longer recognizable as human. He couldn't find her. He didn't know where to look. He asked a face welded into rock and was answered.

"If she is among us she is beyond rescuing." The face laughed, and there was no joy in that laughter.

Throdrexon moved in anger toward the ghoul, and the face laughed again.

"Surely this is one place where your threats mean nothing, don't you think?"

He drew away in horror at what he had contemplated doing. He would *harm* one of these? Aside from being impossible, the idea was sickening.

Overhead winged legions flew, spreading the alarm. It was known that there was an intruder in the land. Throdrexon hurried on.

He came to a forest where the folk were half turned to trees, forever bound to the earth. And the forest was burning, the people screaming, unable to move. Throdrexon passed between them without pause, shielded by the counter-names of fire. Beyond, he crossed a winding black river filled with moaning ghosts—those who came not to Rannon in the flesh—and he didn't contemplate what pains they suffered. He waded across, felt slimy hands caressing his legs, and entered a region of ice, then a windswept steppe, then a field of stone flowers as tall as trees, each with the face of a man. It was among these that the soldiers of Rannon cornered him, things that might once have been men clothed in armor no sword could pierce, armed with swords no blade, not even a dwarf-wrought one, could prevail against. For them he had a new strategem. He reached into his bag of fruits which he had carried all this way, and threw a handful of cherries on the ground.

"Here brave ones! The gifts of Earth!"

And the creatures craved these fruits, not having tasted their like for a thousand centuries, and quickly they fell to fighting among themselves over them. Phantom swords flickered and in the end not one was left standing. Thus Throdrexon escaped for a first time, and a second, and a third.

When the stone flowers ended, he came to an open place where there was a circle of rectangular stones standing on end. And in the middle of these stones there was a giant as tall as a seige tower, bloated in the belly like a toad, pale, paste-colored, with the face of an idiot. The giant held a bottle as big as the *Water Dove*, of trans-

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luscent brown glass. Inside someone struggled in a thick liquor.

The giant raised the bottle to his lips.

The scream from within it was familiar.

"*You!* Stop!" Throdrexon came out from behind a stone and waved Dran on a level with the giant's ankle. The creature threw down the bottle and turned around.

"Who is there? I am Kanatekeli, son of Rannon. Who tells me to stop?"

"Down here! Down here, fat face!"

The giant looked down, saw Throdrexon, and smiled.

"So! You are the new toy Father sends. I shall play a game with you. I shall eat you and excrete you, and eat you again, as long as it pleases me to do so." And the giant laughed, and all the Underearth shook.

Throdrexon made no effort to avoid the warty, bulbous hand that reached for him.

"Wait," he said. "I know another game. Will you play it with me?"

The hand withdrew.

"A game with you? This is a new thing and I like it." The giant giggled. Spittle fell from his chin with a splash. "What sort of game?"

"A game to see who is smarter."

"Ho! Ho! A riddle? I shall guess it then!"

"Perhaps, but first I bring my opponent a gift."

"What?"

"Yes! A gift!" Throdrexon's hand plunged into the sack, and drew out peaches, pears, apples. "The fruits of upper earth! Fresh, juicy! Enjoy them!"

Kanatekeli squealed piggishly and fell to his knees, and the ground shook. The game forgotten he began to shovel the fruits into his mouth.

Not hesitating an instant, Prince Throdrexon ran to where the bottle had fallen and crawled into the neck, gagging at the noxious vapours from within.

He heard a splash. Someone moved.

"Dearest Hamakara? Is it you?"

There was weeping from the back of the bottle.

"Yes, it is I. How did you come to this place? I had hoped you would live long—but now you have not!"

"I live yet, and have come for you, since there can be no life without you. Come now into the light, so that I may see your face again."

He heard more splashing footsteps, receding from him.

"Beloved, hurry!" he said.

"Alas, you would take no pleasure in me now. All that I once was I am no longer. Death has touched me deeply, and there are worms in my flesh."

"This is a thing I had feared." Throdrexon waded into the bottle, knee deep in slime, groping in the darkness until he found Hamakara. Her flesh was cold, and a little too soft. He drew the longer bag over her until she was entirely within, and tied it shut with a string. He hoisted her over his shoulder. He emerged dripping from the bottle's mouth to find the giant on all fours, searching around for more fruits.

He ran swiftly, even under the load of Hamakara. He had reached the edge of the stone flowers by the time Kanatekeli saw him, stood up, and bellowed.

"Little man! You cheat me! You have not played the game yet!"

Throdrexon stopped for an instant and shouted back.

"Yes I have! And I have won! I am much smarter than you!"

The giant snorted with rage and clambered after him, but was quickly entangled in the flowers. Marble stems snapped. Granite petals crashed to the ground. Throdrexon left a trail of fruits behind him as he fled, and the giant caught himself between more rock growths as he crawled about after the apples, pears, and peaches which seemed always a little out of his grasp.

By the time he had them all, the man with the sack was out of sight.

For a few brief moments Throdrexon was free, and as he fled he spoke loving words to Hamakara in the sack, but she only mumbled and could not be heard. She hardly stirred, and he did not stop to open the sack.

He travelled back over the perilous land, over the river, through the winds, through the ice, through the fire, and the howls of Kanatekeli drew ever nearer behind him. He came upon the guards of the land again and offered them fruits, but his supply was running low. Sometimes he struck at them with Dran, knocking them out of the way, toppling them into ravines. This much the dwarf-sword could do. He lost himself

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among the suffering, hiding from the winged squadrons. At last he made it to that final cliff and climbed it. He passed the man with the snakes again, and saw him begin a new cycle of agony. The girl with the maggots lay still as always. Newly admitted dead people made their way clumsily down the slope, and when they got in the Prince's way he simply shoved them aside, sending them plunging to the valley floor below. They could know no more suffering from that than from anything else in this land.

He forced the gate and met the two serpent brothers again. Their heads were back on their shoulders, only they seemed smaller and neckless. Dran dealt with them again.

He forced himself through the columns of dead, cursing and shoving, coughing when he got a faceful of filth. Imps came out at him and he *did* speak a lighting spell, and with swift strokes of Dran, without even breaking his stride, he cut them to pieces. Slowly, they reformed behind him.

All the while the tunnel shook with the snarls and footsteps of Kanatekeli. Bodies were pulped against the stone walls. Throdrexon could hear the bones cracking. His enemy was very near.

He burst out onto the beach again, ran past the piper who didn't seem to notice, and looked back. The giant was not more than a spear's throw away, almost close enough to touch him.

Multitudes were called from the sea. The frantic Prince forced his way among them, and at the water's edge dumped the rest of his fruits and threw away the bag. He gained the ledge and made his way precariously back to his boat. It seemed much farther this time.

He looked back just once to see the giant, still infatuated with the earthly fruits, tossing his father's slaves aside in search of them.

Dran cut the mooring line, and dropped Hamakara in the bottom of the *Water Dove*. The Prince crouched in the bow and pushed the boat out of the inlet, then crawled to the stern and took the tiller in his hand. He untied his wind-rope as far as it would go, and the sail filled. He raced out the channel, weaving his way among the funeral ships and sunken wrecks.

He reached the open sea, and his heart rejoiced, but he was not free. Behind him came the inarticulate cursing of Kanatekeli, then an enormous splash.

The son of Rannon was following him, walking on the bottom of the ocean.

Thus Prince Throdrexon passed out of the Underearth and completed a deed never even attempted by the heroes of old, and yet he thought nothing of it. Away he sailed, back, back over the distance he had come, out of darkness into light, back into the lands of men, and his heart was filled with love and longing for Hamakara. Once he left the Land of the Dead she never stirred inside the sack, for she was not yet of the living, and the half-life which had animated her, the will of Rannon, deserted her. She awaited her lover's sorceries patiently.

The *Water Dove* passed all the marvellous and terrible lands he had known before, and in the Straits of Han the ladies called out to him in vain, recoiling as Kanatekeli followed after. He passed the City of Gog at night and things tittered unseen beyond the gunwhales, but the wind held and the boat went swiftly on. The eyes of Tyan Brath turned from his as he sat awake as always at the tiller, never once giving in to the temptation to open the sack and look inside. Storms and rain followed him all the way, great waves crashing on the boat, sufficient to crush an ordinary vessel, but his three shells and his twig stood up to the test.

At last Nradius passed, and the Dawnview Hills, and Iankoros appeared once again, a speck on the cloudy horizon. It was home, but Throdrexon was not returning home as much as he was embarking on a new quest into deepest necromancy, the quest for the restoration of Hamakara.

Behind, the son of Rannon followed, but Throdrexon was not afraid. He chanted lines of poetry aloud, composing them as he went.

The Celebration of Hamakara was rapidly turning into an epic.

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Chapter 7: The Black Cliffs Again

It was midmorning on a damp and windy day when he reached the Black Cliffs. It was unseasonably cold; the air was frigid but to one who had just come from the farthest North it seemed quite comfortable.

The sea was rough, foamy, the tide all the way in. Throdrexon climbed out of the boat into waist-deep water and dragged the boat onto the beach. He spoke a word of thanks to the gods and the *Water Dove* was no more. Three shells lay in the sand and an ebbing wave carried off the twig.

He unknotted his rope and released his wind. It whirled about him for a moment, angry, yet delighted to be free, and then was gone. He pocketed the rope, and took up the long leather sack over his shoulder, making his way up the narrow path by the cliff face. He reached the top, set his burden down, and waited.

Kanatekeli arrived a half an hour later. The waves leapt over the beach, well beyond the high tide line. They crashed against the Black Cliffs themselves, and high above, Throdrexon felt the spray in his face. A familiar head appeared out of the grey ocean in the dull daylight, then the whole body of the giant emerged, pale and ghastly white, more repugnant now out in the open. The son of the great god waded onto the beach and looked about, sniffed the discarded shells, stared at the footprints leading away, then surveyed the whole area, puzzled.

"Hey! Fat face! Up here!" Throdrexon stood at the edge of the precipice, waving Dran.

Kanatekeli barked. Teeth glistened behind moldy gums.

"Here I am!" cried the Prince. "I have no present for you this time but the point of my good sword!"

The godling saw the gleam of the metal, and laughed. Then he roared, and the island shook. Seabirds fluttered from the cliff in terror. The giant broke into a run, and in a dozen strides he was beneath Throdrexon. Pale hands cut deep holds into the black stone, and a moment later he towered over him.

He laughed again at this little mite who had dared to steal from the flesh-hoard of Rannon, and now shouted such brave words.

He was somewhat disturbed when the man laughed back.

Throdrexon knew triumph then, for the stupidity of the god's offspring had triumphed over all things. Reason, common sense, and advantage lay in ruins before such a mind. Kanatekeli did not seem to realize that here on this island so far to the south, high above the death-sacred sea, and facing the sword Dran which was wrought by the dwarf-king Elthanoe out of the stones of this very island, he was beyond the immediate protection of his father. Rannon was all-patient and *most*-powerful, but not *all*-powerful; the difference was important. For the moment, man and godling faced one another as equals. Relative size meant nothing, and the laughter of Kanatekeli turned into screams of rage when the edge of Dran passed through his ankles like a hot knife through butter, bringing him down in a thunderous heap. Again he tried to let out a howl, but the sound never left his throat before his head was gone. The open neck gurgled, and that was all. Arms and legs thrashed about, wounds spurting puss, and the body wriggled like some grotesque, blind spider, then quivered and lay still.

The Prince waited until he was sure the giant was dead, then cleansed Dran in the earth and resheathed it. He stood before the fallen foe and smiled.

"This was exceedingly well done," he said aloud.

Sack over shoulder he headed for the castle. When he got there he entered by the main gate and ordered the astonished guards to go to the Black Cliffs, where there was something which was to be *buried* rather than thrown into the sea according to the usual custom.

"Lord, what is it?" he was asked.

"It'll be obvious when you get there. Take a dozen laborers along. It's big."

"Lord, where have you been this last week?"

"On an affair of state."

And the guard knew not to inquire any further.

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Inside the Tower of Eagles it was always dark. In the lower part, along the winding staircase, there were no windows, and no torches burned. Night slept there, ready to arise and spill out onto the land in a tide of shadows.

Throdrexon climbed the stone stairs that were now so familiar to him, taking in three per stride. He moved briskly, confidently, eager to be on with his work. He recalled his first trip up these stairs, long ago, and laughed. Everything had changed. This was *his* tower now.

When he got to the top he commanded the trapdoor to open, and it did, lifted by an invisible hand. He spoke the lighting spell before he saw there was no need. The torches were already lit. Zio Theremderis was waiting for him, seated over a book, as he had been that first time.

"Welcome back, Lord," said the wizard. There was no feeling in his speech.

"Hello," said Throdrexon without pausing. He placed his cargo down beside Theremderis' desk, in the middle of the floor where there were still traces of circles and names and old memories.

Theremderis closed the book and set it aside.

"My pupil—I mean, my Prince." He smiled at his mistake, and then the smile faded. "This is a mighty thing you have done."

"It probably is. I was too busy doing it to think about it."

"No hero has ever attempted such a thing. It is without precedent in all the histories."

"Then we'll write the histories later. Now I am too busy."

"I fear greatly what those writings will tell," said the older man slowly.

"What is that supposed to mean?"

Theremderis was vaguely sarcastic, with undertones of sorrow.

"What? Don't you know? Or hadn't you thought about it?"

The Prince dug both hands into his hair, and paced the length of the room. He faced a bookshelf, turned around, spoke, and his voice was shrill. He sounded like a boy again.

"I don't know—I mean, yes, I do—I mean—Please, there is so much to prepare. I need your help now more than I've ever needed it before. I need you to—to—"

He couldn't bring himself to utter the thing, but pointed, and his finger spoke for him.

"I can't do it," said Theremderis.

"*What?*" Throdrexon's voice was deeper again. He shouted as if giving a command.

"Such a thing I cannot do," said Theremderis again. "I haven't the power. No wizard does."

"By the gods of jesters, fools and moonstruck old ladies, *that* is a lie! A traitorous lie! *I* can almost do it. I have raised up animals—a horse even. I almost raised a man upon the sea. You—you are the greatest magician in all the world, and you trained me. Together we can do it, if we pool our strength. If we work together."

The white-bearded face nodded sadly.

"No, you don't understand. Animals have no spirit. They are just moving flesh. It is easy with them. But to raise up a woman, to restore her soul to her, is a thing we cannot do, not alone, not together, not with the help of every wizard, mage and village witch in all the lands of men. Such a thing would mean opposing Rannon directly in the area he controls most strongly—*death.*"

"*Can't* means you *won't!* You mean you *refuse* to help me. Are you afraid?"

"No, I am not afraid."

"Then you'll do it?"

"No."

"Why? Can't you see that I love her? Can't you see that?"

"Love is not enough. Rannon is stronger than love."

"I order you, as your legal sovereign, to aid me in this matter. I don't want to do it this way. I have never ordered you before. I'm sorry I have to now."

The wizard did not stir. He folded his hands, unfolded them, folded them again, let his beard brush over them, and stared at his crossed thumbs. He was still for an instant, then said slowly:

"My Prince, with great regret I must disobey your first order to me, for it is a rash one. You have not considered where this thing will lead you. I think you will destroy yourself and maybe all Iankoros with you. I trained you, yes I did, and you were a

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bright pupil, but I fear you learned no wisdom. You have none; you show none. Statecraft has never been your strong point, and I have had to watch over the things you have done. Still I protect you, as I did when you were a child. I fear you are a child still in some ways. You are still standing by that window yonder, and still you make pigeons vanish from rooftops. I can't bring myself to participate in your undoing."

Throdrexon screamed. "If you don't obey me, I'll have your head cut off!"

His teacher looked at him sadly. "Would you really do that?"

And Throdrexon said nothing, for he knew he would not. He trembled like one bound. He did not know what to do. A choice was before him—Theremderis or Hamakara, his past or his future, love or wisdom.

At last he whispered hoarsely.

"Leave me then. I forget your name. I don't know you anymore."

In silence Zio Theremderis rose. His footsteps were soft as he walked around the desk to the trapdoor. He didn't look back as he descended the stairs, with the weight of the Prince's words upon him.

It was only when he was outside in the courtyard that he began to weep.

Throdrexon's spirits were dampened by the encounter with Theremderis. He had been exultant at his feat—he *had* thought about it and rejoiced in it—but now he felt empty, nervous, alone. He had now cut himself adrift from the one he had always counted on for security. He knew he was on his own, that his magic and no other would bring back Hamakara. The teacher was gone. Love had brought him this far, and he could not turn back.

Love—that was the answer. He had failed to ressurect the man on the funeral ship because he had not loved him. He didn't care the slightests bit about him. It was just another experiment, like the ones with dogs and cats. Nothing more.

This time it would be different. He had not known the man's name and that was important. It had limited him, but he would not be so limited again. This time he was in his own tower where his power was the strongest, with all his books and equipment around him, and he knew the name of the one he was to raise up—*Hamakara,* and no other. There was involvement this time, emotion to drive him. The strongest of all magic is a kind of emotion, or at least powered by it, and with this magic there would be love.

Theremderis had been wrong. It *could* be done. Rannon's influence was weak here. His son had been slain on this very isle, and the Death God had made no effort to protect him. Now again he was to be overcome, and the life of Hamakara snatched from him.

The Prince sat awhile paging through precious volumes, reviewing aspects of necromancy and leechcraft, all things concerned with the restoration of strength, the rekindling of spirit. He rehearsed spells to make sure he had them right, and then he knew he was ready.

He cleared the floor again, but drew no shapes for protection. This one he called upon was a friend, not an enemy. It was late in the day, and the shadows grew long in the room, when he prepared for his conjuring. He laid the corpse out flat, still in the sack. He wrote on the floor around it in the ashes of the phoenix, that royal bird whose shape was the sign of his house. He wrote the name of Hamakara Rae Karavasha Ke Throdrexon, Princess on High of Iankoros and Mistress of the Lesser Isles, and he wrote the true name of the blossom after which she had been named, and also the lines to the verse he had composed in her honor on a day that seemed so very long ago.:

Empty perches high above,
Gone the eagle, gone the dove,
Together they are bound in love—
They've flown the whole world over.

He scattered rose petals over the floor, roses grown eons before when the world had been young, and kept ever fresh in bottles by charms. He stood nineteen candlesticks around in a circle, naming them for each of Hamakara's years, and he kissed them one by one and lit them with his words. They were scented, and the room filled with a sweet odor.

At last when all was ready he opened the

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book with the iron hasp, the *Greatbook of Thamalamach'in,* written in that sage's own clear hand. He took the *Book of Life* and read from it the words of life, naming the names of all the living things, speaking the words first whispered by Hsalim Yin on the Earth's initial day. He spoke these words and reached out again with his hands, not into the cold and darkness of space, but into the heart of Hamakara, into her soul, and the love that bound him eternally to her. He reached out, and he called to her, saying, "Rise up, rise up my love and come away. Let not your feet be still any longer. Let not your hands lie cold. Let your breasts be firm again and your eyes sparkle. May your voice laugh when you rise up and sing. Rise up, rise up my dear one, and sing a song of joy, for behold, from darkness you are brought into life, from sorrow into delight, from sleeping into dance. Rise up, as I command you, for I speak the words of life and call on you by your truest name which is Beloved."

And she rose. The bag began to stir and Throdrexon put down the book and rushed to her. He untied the strings and pulled the sack away, and Hamakara lay before him as he had always known her, fresh and beautiful. She moved and rose to her feet, and there was a great light shining all about her.

Yet she did not speak, and in her eyes there was no sign of recognition.

"Sing!" cried Throdrexon. "Sing the song of joy. Sing the verse I have written. Sing it with me!"

He began to sing, and stopped when he realized that his voice was alone.

"Please! With me now. *Empty perches high above—*"

He stood and her mouth fell open, and she gurgled, "Gone, ggg . . ."

"Beloved! It is I!"

She did not know him. The light began to fade. Her skin grew wrinkled. She fell forward, scattering the candles.

"No!" His words became screams as he reached out for her, with his hands, with his love, with his magic. His whole body trembled as he wrestled with great words, with great spells, with the hand of Rannon, with the deepening shadows. His power was like a candle in a vast cavern, a tiny speck against the eternal darkness. It flickered for a while, and went out.

Chapter 8: The White Isle

Zio Theremderis left the castle by the back gate. He said no word to the guards there, and the night was very still, with only the scattered calls of night birds and the tapping of the wizard's cane on the wooden drawbridge. When he reached soft ground, the birds sang alone.

He headed west, along the length of the island, away from the harbor, in the general direction of the Black Cliffs. At one time, all Iankoros was covered with trees, but men cut them to make way for their villages and crop-filled fields. Still the forest lurked at the edges of human habitations, waiting for a time when the axe would lie forever silent. Theremderis walked through these trees, into the open, into the trees again, to the edge of a field of wheat. The moon was high and full, and the land bright. The old man came to the end of the shadows and paused. He heard laughter.

Two lovers sat on a rock the farmer's plow had never moved. They laughed and giggled, and passed a bottle of wine back and forth, quite drunk. The young man gulped, and the liquid ran down his chin.

"To life!" he shouted. "I drink to our life together. It will be nothing but joy."

"There will be hard times also," said the maiden softly. She had more of her wits about her. "Life is just like that."

The man took her face in his hands and pulled her toward him until their noses touched.

"With you my days will be an unending joy, one golden hour after another until the ending of time. We shall have one strong baby, then another, then another, till Iankoros is covered with them, and is renamed the Isle of Lanareth's Kindred. I'll be the king and you'll be queen. Alright?"

"Oh," she pushed him away. "That's treason." She laughed, and he took her in his arms.

"If it's treason, then I say enjoy, enjoy."

"What would the Prince say?" she said in mock seriousness.

"Nothing, probably. I don't think he'd notice. When was the last time anyone saw a trace of him?"

She did not reply. The two of them kissed and lay out flat on the rock.

Theremderis withdrew again into the gloom of the woods and wandered on until

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he came out another way. He thought of what he had seen and shook his head sadly.

He came to a field left fallow, crossed it, and climbed a low, rolling hill. Back to the east the castle was only a series of lights above treetops and gentle slopes. The Tower of Eagles stood tall above the others, the torches in its summit burning like a red eye glaring out over the world. The wizard knew that Throdrexon was conjuring, and yet the night was still. It was a different kind of conjuring this time, quieter, more subtle, and yet it was a sad and terrible thing.

Somewhere in the distance a drover was driving cows in from late pasture, singing a song of earth and green living things. Theremderis heard that song and listened long after its words had faded away. He knew that the drover was happy, that he had found content, and the great events of the world never troubled him. He wanted to be like that man himself, dearly, more than anything else. He would give up all his power, his learning, and his authority just to walk the dusty roads of the world and camp by their side each night, to rise again in the morning and walk, to sing, and to camp again. And one morning, he knew not when, he would not rise, and his sleep would go on forever. His bones would lie by the side of the road forever and perhaps other wanderers would muse over them, but they would not trouble themselves for long. That would be all, and all of it was impossible, forever beyond his grasp, like the stars above him, like the strange fire that burned in the heart of Prince Throdrexon, something he could not touch or control.

He thought of the Prince, and of his life with the boy. After a while the boy had become a man, and that strangeness began. It was a turn more subtle than the cleverest puzzle, but it was a turn nonetheless. The wizard and the pupil had parted ways, and the one who now conjured in the Tower of Eagles was all but a stranger. He resembled someone Zio Theremderis had once known long ago, but he was not the same person. Theremderis had loved that boy and that boy had loved him, but who was this other? He was someone who would not hear the words of reason, who thought himself like unto a god and fit to wrestle with the only god of any consequence. He was someone who had, incredibly, succeeded in something unthinkable, and was now only beginning in what he intended to do. He was a madman about to bring on disaster, the doom of all Iankoros. All lovers, drovers, wizards, trees, houses, castles, the very name of Iankoros would be swept away. In the universe of Rannon there was no such thing as innocence.

The old man blamed himself for all this. He assumed that the failing had been within himself. He had neglected to instill in the Prince the proper humility, a true understanding of man's lowly place in the universe. He had lectured on the evils of pride, but not enough. Because of this Throdrexon lacked the foresight to see the consequences of his actions. He thought what he had done was over, and what he was about to do would soon be over also. A little man had pinched the flesh of a god, a mouse had assaulted a dragon, and for the moment escaped unharmed. This was not to be for long. The vengeance of the dragon was as inevitable as the coming of the new day.

As if to bear witness to this, dawn came. The wizard walked throughout the night, far from the castle, to the other end of the island, alone with his thoughts. Then golden fire fingered across the sky behind him, and night retreated before the onslaught of morning. The stars faded, hid themselves. The sea beyond the shadow of Iankoros began to glitter, and the birds asleep in the branches awoke and began to sing.

He had come to the last village, very near to the Black Cliffs. The village was no more than a dozen wooden huts, a few barns, some crude fences. He walked along the single dirt road through the middle of it, and sleepy-eyed milkmaids met him with astonished stares.

"A wizard! A wizard!" The word was whispered, and shutters creaked open a crack, expectant of miracles. Finally a child, a girl of no more than four, with dirty feet and uncombed hair, ran out into the middle of the street, planted herself firmly before Theremderis and asked, "Are you a wizard?"

He nodded.

"Can you do magic, then?"

"Yes."

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"Can you do *anything*?"

"No, not anything."

The girl was puzzled. "I thought wizards could do anything."

Theremderis smiled. "No, but we can do enough things to occupy our time."

"Can you make money?"

"What?"

"Gold. Make me a gold coin. A shiny new one."

"Young lady, you have learned the ways of the world too soon." He sighed, then laughed. "Hold out your hand."

She did, and he passed his own hand over hers, and said a word, and there was a large gold coin in her palm.

"Oooh! Real gold!" She ran off without bothering to thank him, and knocked on a door. "Mommy! Look! A real gold coin—"

She stopped in mid-sentence. The coin had disappeared. She gaped at her empty hand, then turned to Theremderis.

"Where is it?"

"Nowhere. It was an illusion, that's all."

"You're not a real wizard! You can't do anything at all!" She turned and pounded on the door again, and began to cry. The door opened and the child went in. A middle aged woman stood in the doorway glaring at the wizard.

He couldn't find anything to say. He walked the rest of the way out of the village in silence. He felt small and very sad. At last he came to the Black Cliffs, and to the grave of Kanatekeli. There was a great mound of earth there, barren of all life, and the grass curled brown and dead in a ring around it.

Theremderis prodded the grave with his cane.

"Well, I might not be a real wizard, but this is real, and I fear it."

He looked to the north and felt a shiver of dread. Somewhere, beyond the edge of the world, Rannon sat, plotting revenge. Foolishly had Throdrexon put faith in Yoth, in Ctharan Ctho, and the other little gods. They were like paper boats in a tempest, far less than merely insignificant, their very existence denied.

Theremderis addressed the mound.

"Tell me, what does your father intend? It's alright to confide in me. I cannot stop him."

And slowly the mound began to rise. It had been rising for a while before Theremderis had arrived, but he had not seen it before and didn't notice the change. Now, at last the movement was faster, just barely perceptible.

"Foeman, what is this?" asked the wizard. The grave did not answer but rose with increasing speed, obviously swelling, like a cake when the yeast is added. It grew until it was twice its original size, and clods of dirt tumbled from its sides. Theremderis waved his hands and his cane, and spoke spells, but they did not stop the action. He hadn't expected them to. He had no name to call upon, no real power. He was beyond hope, and only wanted to be doing something.

The mound rose some more, and Theremderis cried, "Stop!" He invoked Yoth, protector of the island, and there was no response. Finally, he ran a short ways away, then turned again to watch.

The grave of Kanatekelei exploded like a gigantic fungus puffball. Soil flew, and with it a white powder like unseasonable snow. Wherever it landed the grass died, and flowers withered and dropped their petals.

And as if a preternatural voice had called them, all the birds nesting in the Black Cliffs rose into the air, and the white dust rose also, a silent whirlwind, and it touched the birds. They fell into the sea, spread upon it as powder, and dissolved.

"So, Rannon! This is your vengeance," said Theremderis. "It is worthy of you."

Down in the Underearth, the Death Lord heard him, laughed, and went off to model a new body for his son. A wind blew out of the north, carrying the white dust over Iankoros. It was the fetid breath of Rannon.

Theremderis withdrew, and the white stuff followed him. It was something new, wholly inimical to life, and he could not stop it. It spread on the ground and drifted on the wind. The wind was rising now, stronger out of the north. Trees were touched, and they became white, and crumbled, and burst, and scattered. A stag came running by, the pride of any hunter. It stumbled and fell. Theremderis, overcome for an instant by curiosity, came forward and poked the animal with his stick. The end passed right through without any

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resistance where flesh and bones should have been. The fur turned white, and the form of the creature was entirely lost. It looked like spilled salt.

The wizard felt a burning in his eyes, an acrid, smoky sensation in his throat. The stuff was all around him. He ran, and it followed, and his old legs began to tire. He spoke a protective word to keep the whiteness from him.

The powder seemed to be pouring up from the grave of Kanatekeli, and everything it touched became more of it. It rained from the sky and travelled on the morning breeze. There was no ending to it.

Theremderis reached a tree as yet untouched by the contagion. He called down from the branches a sparrow, spoke six words and a name, and held an eagle in his hand. With a seventh, the bird grew ten times its original size, till its outspread wings dwarfed the man, and Theremderis said, "Quickly, bear me up."

The eagle flapped above him, and took the wizard by the hair and lifted him up, taking him away from the tree just as it paled and cracked and fell over, away from that polluted spot to the other end of the island, where lay the castle of the Prince, called the Phoenix Nest, a splendid joke for a dying island.

Theremderis looked down on the fields and forests of Iankoros as they rose and fell beneath him like some strange and stormy sea. And like foam, the white death washed over all, covering all, smothering all, until the land and the sky were mute, until nothing moved in the pastures and towns. So fast it spread that he feared he would not reach the castle in time.

"Faster! Faster!" he called to the bird in its own language.

He saw people here and there, farmers, tradesmen, sailors, with their wives and children, running over the fields, clogging the roads with carts and donkeys. He was too high up to discern the fear on their faces, but he knew it was there, along with the pain, as they choked and fell and were covered by the relentless white wave. Even high up, the air was foul with it.

Fires rose in the fields. Men were burning their crops in an attempt to stay the advance. Flame and smoke held it off, but only for a moment, before the tide moved over the land as before, and these who fought perished with those who fled. There was no difference. It was the way of Rannon.

At last the towers and walls of the Phoenix Nest were visible, and Theremderis was no longer afraid. He was a few minutes ahead of the spreading death, and the air was clear ahead. He felt strangely calm, like a man come to announce a death long expected. Everything was in the end inevitable. Even his own fate was in hands other than his own.

From this distance, when the screams of the dying were unheard, the wintry demise of Iankoros looked almost beautiful. Denuded forests stood like crystaline hairs on snow-covered hillsides before they crumpled. Faerie shapes danced in the wispy clouds. Still, it was all completely silent.

The eagle set Theremderis down in the courtyard before the tower, and Zio Theremderis dismissed his servant, bidding it flee on its mighty wings as far as it could go. And the eagle flew and the pigeons of the castle rose up after it, alone as witnesses to the doom of Iankoros.

Without a word and with speed unbefitting his great age, Theremderis climbed the spiralling staircase of worn stone. He threw open the trapdoor and entered the room. He stood aghast at what he saw.

The corpse of Hamakara lay in the middle of the floor by the crumbled sack and a pile of broken candlesticks. Prince Throdrexon knelt over her, and as Theremderis watched he kissed the purple lips, disturbing a worm which peered from Hamakara's nostril, causing it to retreat into her head.

The young man fondled the corpse's stringy hair and spoke in a high, squeaking voice.

"This I have written for you." He began to recite lines from the *Celebration of Hamakara* with a concentration and obliviousness to his surroundings that betokened madness.

It was a pitiful sight, and Theremderis was holding back tears when he put his hand on the other's shoulder and said, "My boy, what are you doing now?"

Throdrexon stopped chanting. He froze

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like one turned to stone, then slowly, very slowly, he turned his head and looked up at the white-bearded wizard who stood over him.

"What am I doing? Why, I am speaking to my beloved. Have you gone deaf, old man?"

"I am not deaf, My Prince, but she is. She cannot hear you."

"What do you mean? I did it. I did what I said I would. I raised her up—and nothing you could do stopped me. I did it without you, and I shall never need your help again for anything."

"My Prince, you have done nothing but doom your people."

"Who said you could come in here anyway to hear my private conversations. Didn't I send you away?" There was a touch of rising anger in Throdrexon's voice.

"Your people . . . They are all dying right now, at the hand of Rannon!"

"What do I care about my people? You save them from this peril if you want. I have more important things to do. Hamakara is great with my child, and I must wait here."

"Come away now." He tugged at the Prince's shoulder, and the other cursed. He looked into the face and saw someone wholly alien, entirely a stranger, hostile, an enemy he had never seen before yet feared. In the supreme irony, this monster had been created out of love and devotion and little else.

"You! You would not help me!" The Prince sprang to his feet.

"Please! Come with me now. Leave this tower. It is a tomb, a stinking, open grave and nothing more. Leave your vain sorceries and—"

"Vain? You call them vain after what I have done? You dare call them vain?"

Theremderis tried to be calm and firm. "You have done nothing, Prince Throdrexon. You are blind to it, yet a corpse lies on your floor devoid of life. I am Zio Theremderis, your teacher, and I tell you this."

The young man cocked his head in an odd way, pointed at Theremderis, and spoke in a distracted whisper. His voice was high, almost cracking, and to the wizard it did not sound like the voice of the Prince he knew.

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"You—I know you. I have known you all my life. You are my enemy. Whatever I wanted you took from me. you would not tell me what I wanted to know. You took my beloved from me once, and now you want to take her again. Yes, that's it."

"No," said Theremderis. "That's not it at all."

"Yes it is!" Throdrexon screamed. Veins stood out on his forehead. He turned quickly about like a trapped animal. He glimpsed the dagger Theremderis always wore on his belt, which hung there now sheathed and forgotten, and in his hazed frame of mind he drew sinister meaning out of it. Or perhaps he saw something else aglitter, or merely imagined he did. He sensed the wizard's disapproval and quickly construed this to mean something evil, an attack on Hamakara and her child. His teacher moved toward him again, causing imagined provocations to multiply a thousandfold, and the Prince let out a berserker's yell. Before the other could even blink, Dran was out of the scabbard and into the air. Throdrexon struck Theremderis a terrible blow on the neck, and the sword passed right through. The head twirled across the room with an astounded look on its face, and the body fell backwards onto the floor. The arms thrashed, almost bringing the corpse to a sitting position, then went limp. The open neck spurted blood like a broken fountain, spreading a wide stain over the floorboards.

"I told you to leave me! I told you I didn't know you anymore! I told you that much. I did. I told you."

The rage died, and the Prince stood quietly for a minute. Then he put the head and body in the leather sack, tied it shut, and turned his attention once more to Hamakara.

A stray thought came to him, the prophecy of the dwarf-king: "Many heads shall this sword cut off, *but the last shall be the head of wisdom.*"

"The head of wisdom," he mused. The shock of the murder brought him half-way back to sanity, but only half way. He trembled uncontrollably with the horror of something, but he didn't know what. Something had been lost forever, only he could not identify it. Everything was so confused, so tangled. It was hard to remember why anything was the way it was.

Something was happening in the land. He rose and went to the window. He looked out and saw the white clouds pouring over his kingdom, hugging the ground and leaching it clean of life. There was no one moving beyond the castle walls. The white powder had gathered into drifts, and the wind propelled it against the castle, wave upon wave. Guards on the ramparts covered their faces, ran and fell.

The snowy substance poured over the undefended walls, and at the sight of it Prince Throdrexon did two distinctly rational things.

First he bolted all his windows and the trapdoor leading into the room. He dipped his fingers in the blood of Theremderis and sealed those openings with the signs of Yoth and Ctharan Ctho, and with the countersign of Rannon.

Secondly he looked sadly on the still form of Hamakara, and said, "Goodbye." He could not even weep. It was beyond all that now. A hint of the truth came, and there was only surrender. He took up herbs and ashes and candles again, and sat down with the *Book of Life* open. He spoke the words of life once more, but for a different purpose.

He sought only to save the child. This he could do, and his wizardry offended no god. The Death Lord had no claim over one who had not yet lived. Soon the womb of Hamakara began to swell like an overripe fruit.

Throdrexon gave the baby a name, a secret name neither male nor female, and with it he alone held power over the child. He summoned it forth from the unliving, and the day passed. Messengers came and banged on the trapdoor, screaming of a white doom, and after a while they were silent. A strong wind buffetted the tower, seeking entrance and finding none. Toward evening the womb burst into tatters of blue-grey flesh, and out came the child.

It was a girl.

"Well, my heir shall be a Princess then," said Throdrexon. He sang a brief song of joy and gave the infant another name, and each line of the song rhymed with that new

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name: Amadel, meaning "flower of my flower."

When the sun again beheld Iankoros the isle was a desolate table of stone rising above the sea. All life had been wiped from it, save that which was sealed in the Tower of Eagles. The halls of the Phoenix Nest were silent, and the castle rode like a ship on a snowy ocean. Here and there houses stuck up out of the piled whiteness, their doors and windows hanging open like senseless eyes, and the hilltops were bare, naked rock and nothing more. Weeks passed, and sailors came to Iankoros and turned away, and they spoke of it by a new name, the White Isle, and they sailed there no more. Now the boatmen of the Arrax looked with dread at what lay beyond the mouth of their river.

Rains came and with them friendly winds. Gradually, the contagion was washed away into the sea, and dead fish covered all the seashore of Amyrthel The powder flew like ash into the wind, half active, diluted, still capable of making men cough a thousand meters distant.

In the end, only the stones were left, and the soil also, dead and still, never again to sprout growth.

The sea cleansed itself after awhile and the seagulls came back to nest among the desolate rocks. But that was all. The Isle of the Phoenix did not renew itself.

When it was safe, Throdrexon opened one of his shutters, threw the body of Zio Theremderis down into the courtyard below and closed the shutter again.

The baby cried.

Bio-Sketch

Darrell Schweitzer

Born August 27, 1952. B.A. Geography, M.A. English, both from Villanova University. Graduate of Clarion SF Writers Workshop, Michigan State Univ. 1973. Has been selling stories regularly since 1973. Published in magazines including *Whispers, Fantasy & Terror, Fantastic, Void, Asimov's SF, Weirdbook, Fantasy Crossroads*, etc. and anthologies *Swords Against Darkness* 3 and 5, *Year's Best Horror Stories VII, Andromeda 3, Other Worlds, Alien Worlds. The White Isle* is first novel, *We Are All Legends* is second. Both will be published by Borgo Press. Third in progress is *The Shattered Goddess*. Nonfiction books include *SF Voices* (interviews—2 volumes), *Essays Lovecraftian*, critiques of Robert E. Howard and H. P. Lovecraft, a pamphlet, *Lovecraft In The Cinema*, and many more forthcoming. Editor of *The Ghosts of the Heaviside Layer* by Lord Dunsany.

Fiction has been translated into German, Dutch and Norwegian. Currently assistant editor for *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine* and *Asimov's SF Adventure*. Used to be an amateur entymologist. Currently highly interested in history and obscure corners of ancient and medieval literature. Doesn't know anybody else who has read Geoffrey of Monmouth and The Venerable Bede, let alone the *Gesar Leng* epic.

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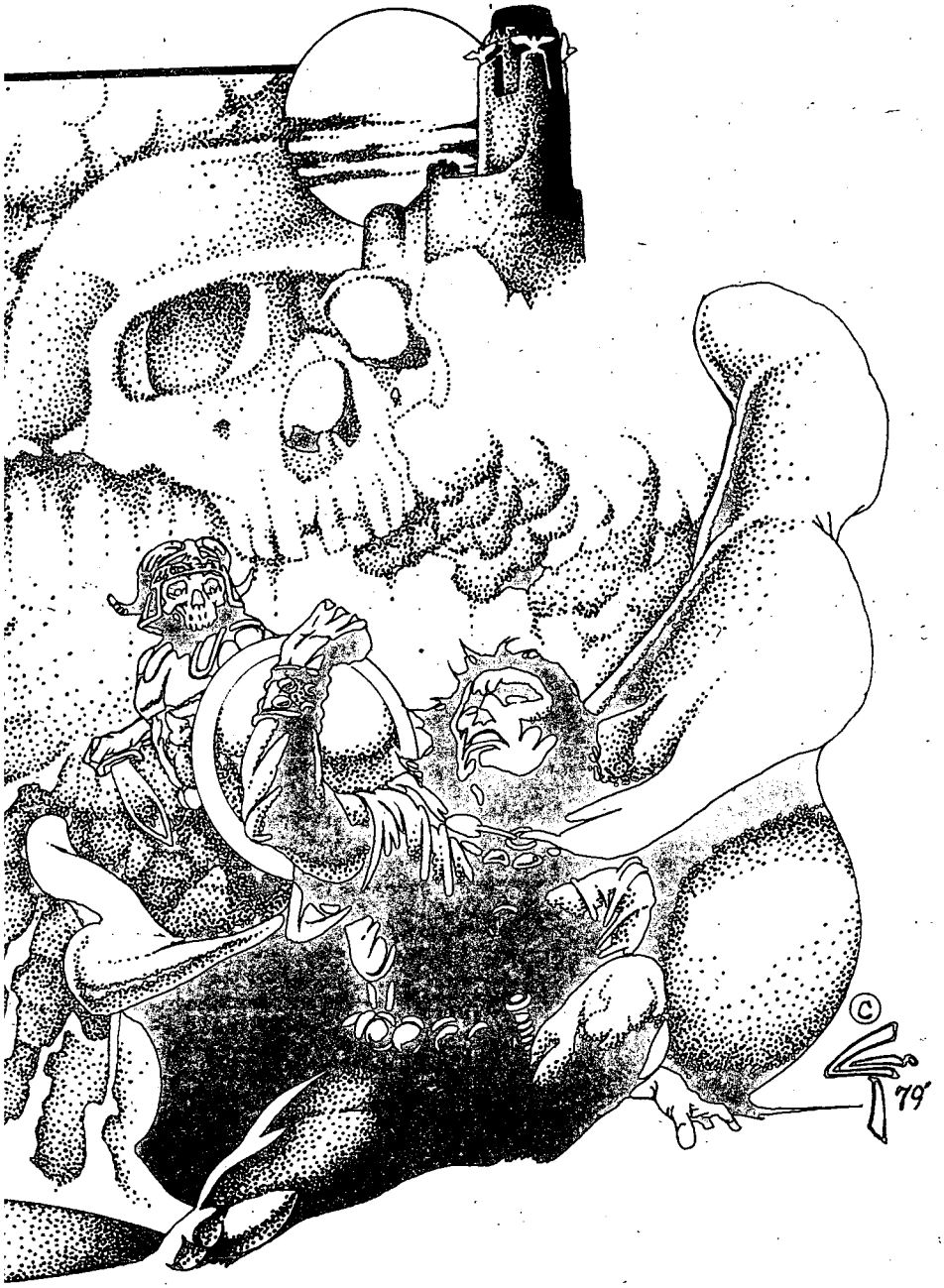

End of Part I. Completion of the novel coming in the July, 1980 issue.

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When it happens, you may touch the edges of infinity

ENCOUNTER with the UNIVERSE

by Thea Carvel

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Illustrated by Joe Staton

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THE FIRST shower of sunshine had reached the blue-green valley. It fell from the majestic, snow-capped peaks in clusters of gigantic shafts of gold, piercing the dense mist that brewed in the mountain cauldron. Stirred up, the haze dissolved into eerie forms and writhed away in the dawn.

Enclosed by low stone walls, the small barley and buckwheat fields along the riverbed glistened with thin, square sheets of silvery dew, while in the distance four brightly painted chortens glowed with a strange luminosity. Ever-present in Tibet and its borderlands, these sacred towers straddled the path to the monastery like sentinels from another realm.

Leaning over the balustrade of the old monastery, I had a last look at this unearthly sunrise in the Himalayas. It was time to say good-by to their unrivalled splendor; tomorrow I would be on my way down to the heartland of Kashmir and from there to Peshawar for my flight back to the States.

Suddenly the quick, distinct sound of footsteps broke in upon the stillness. Annoyed at the intrusion, I turned around rather abruptly but my irritation subsided at once, as I recognized the abbot in the approaching figure. I enjoyed and esteemed his company and did not mind sharing this precious moment with him.

A Geshe, or Doctor of Divinity, from Drepung monastery near Lhasa, the High Lama Ame Cheuzang was a man of vast learning. In the late forties he had lived for a number of years in London and Paris, working at the Archives of the British Museum and at the Sorbonne on tantric texts together with various scientific teams of international renown. After his return to Tibet he had been sent to a monastery in eastern Kashmir just before the Chinese take-over of his country in the early fifties. Thus he had escaped the cataclysmic disruption of the monastic communities after the communist invasion, which eventually forced the XIV Dalai Lama to flee to India.

None of these events had affected Ame Cheuzang's external life to any great extent, especially as his sect, the Sakayapas or Red Hats, did not come directly under the Dalai Lama's spiritual leadership, his Holiness being the head of the more widely spread Gelugpas or Yellow Hats. The monastery itself, however, had experienced a considerable expansion in the wake of the Dalai Lama's flight, when it had to integrate close to a thousand refugee monks into its daily life.

At first I had been unable to understand how a man with his background, who could quite easily have stayed in the West as a valued member of almost any university, could have chosen to live in this all but inaccessible valley in one of the wildest regions of the Karakoram Range. As the days and weeks went by, however, and a subtle change took place in my Western way of thinking, this question gradually faded

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out of my mind. He seemed to belong here. In the same way I half-forgot the reasons for my own journey. For the first time in my thirty years I had found a true inner peace, a kind of spiritual serenity, although I had never been religious in the accepted sense of the word. Whatever the cause, the past two months had been a milestone in my life.

The abbot must have been aware of my reluctance to tear myself away from the glorious spectacle that had become a symbol for my newly found feeling of contentment. A faint, indulgent smile spread over his bronzed face, as he looked straight into my eyes.

"I am pleased that our valley has given you at least something to take back with you. Not what you expected, but as you probably have realized by now, of much greater value." He paused, shivering slightly in the crisp mountain air.

Tall and sinewy with a bony face, Ame Cheuzang did not show his age; although past eighty, I wouldn't have guessed at more than fifty. He was an extraordinary man, both physically and mentally.

"You see, I do know why you came to these mountains," he continued quietly, taking up where he had left off, "and I am glad you never put your questions to us."

It was the first time Ame Cheuzang had alluded to the purpose of my visit. Slightly embarassed, I was about to answer, when the abbot raised his hand, as if to brush aside my intended words.

"You came with doubts regarding the mental powers some of us are supposed to possess, isn't that so?"

"Yes, but — "

"There is no need for excuses," he replied calmly, "doubt is understandable in someone who has been brought up with the materialistic concepts of the West. To us, mind over matter is a reality which we do not question. Supernormal powers are natural faculties of the mind, acquirable by anyone with the knowledge and patience to fulfill the necessary preconditions. Still, we are adverse to 'demonstrating' such abilities or even to discussing them. I think you sensed this for yourself and therefore never pressed the point. No true master of the occult sciences ever allows himself to boast or make public exhibition of his yogic skills. It is only in secret initiations of disciples that they are shown, if at all. To tell the truth, such powers are not even held in particularly high esteem, as a deliberate effort to cultivate them would distract devotees from the infinitely more rewarding quest for Liberation, or Nirvana.

"Of course, we do allow for a few exceptions, particularly where healing is concerned, but on the whole the emergence of the Psi-faculty, as you call it, is regarded only as a by-product of spiritual development."

The abbot stopped talking and looked down into the courtyard that

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was beginning to fill with huddled shapes, summoned to early morning prayers by the beat of kettle drums, clashes of cymbals and the resounding call of ancient Tibetan temple horns.

One by one the monks were emerging from their cells, still shivering from the cold night. Wrapped in maroon monastic garbs, they squatted on straw mats murmuring monotonous mantras and enjoying their traditional meal of tsampa flour, ground from roast barley, and hot, buttered tea. At the entrance of the monastery, in front of a huge, wooden portal, a team of yaks and mules, all decorated with colorful harnesses and large copper bells, was being prepared to fetch salt from the Tibetan highlands at the source of the Brahmaputra river. Observing the bustling activity, I couldn't help thinking how tomorrow my own small caravan would be waiting at the same spot, ready to take me on my long and arduous journey.

An assistant professor of physics at a mid-western university, I had for the past several years watched with considerable alarm the growing involvement of students and fellow physicists with such unscientific — at least to my way of thinking — subjects as telepathy, clairvoyance, psychokinesis and astral projection. Although I felt that there was a great deal of charlatanism involved and too much wishful thinking as well as unreasonable emotionality, I could not wholly deny my colleagues' claim that extrasensory phenomena posed a serious challenge to science. My decision to make a systematic study of the whole area had taken me to various well-known parapsychological centers in the country but had, nevertheless, left me unconvinced. Too much of what I came across could be attributed to chance, the rest was vague at best and downright fraudulent at worst. Admitted that chance itself was a very curious phenomenon, as some researchers have found recently, I could not discover any supernatural connection.

It was during my stay at the University of Virginia the previous summer, that an acquaintance of mine suggested I investigate some of the Buddhist monasteries in the Himalayas, more precisely those belonging to one or the other of the Red Hat sects, well-known for their metaphysical practices and methods of mind control, that are supposed to produce remarkable Psi-powers in their adepts.

Through connections at my own faculty I was eventually able to obtain an introductory letter to Ame Cheuzang from one of his former British collaborators on Buddhist texts, and that is how I came here; to visit one of the foremost existing training centers of the Sakayapas under the pretext of a holiday.

MY REFLECTIONS were suddenly interrupted by a loud chanting, intoned by the close to two thousand monks that had gathered in the monastery square.

The abbot turned his back on the throbbing life below and gazed past me out over the valley.

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"I regret your leaving us so soon," he said hesitantly. "Two months seems such a short time. In spite of all, I would like you to depart from us with more than new-found peace, precious as this may be." He cleared his throat and frowned. "I have thought the matter over carefully and decided to disclose something to you that might, in its own way, prove to be a greater challenge to your scientific mind than any mental feats performed by us. By way of compensation, if you will. Regard it as my farewell gift to you."

We entered the building and walked along familiar corridors, whose mud-brick walls were smooth and cool. A strange excitement had taken hold of me. I did not know what to expect, but knowing Ame Cheuzang and his usual reticence, I was convinced it would be something extraordinary indeed.

All of a sudden, the abbot disappeared in an opening that led into some kind of dark, windowless maze. I would have lost him, had it not been for the faint rustling of his silken robe, that indicated the direction he was taking. This was new ground for me now. The walls were closing in, as we made several turns.

I nearly walked into him in front of what turned out to be a heavy, wooden door. As it creaked open, unlocked by a huge key, which he must have produced from under his robe; I was almost blinded by the bright light that met us. My pupils contracted painfully, and I stepped back, for a moment hesitant to continue.

The room was very large, compared with what I had been accustomed to as living quarters in the monastery — about forty feet long and thirty wide, with one of those high, airy ceilings usually only found in assembly and reception halls. It was completely held in a light ochre, which provided a muted background for the beautiful, if somewhat faded, frescoes of figures from the Buddhist pantheon that stretched along at eye-level to my left, and the elaborate, newly painted Tibetan Magic Square that glowed in colors of magnificent intensity to my right. Facing me, were three fair-sized bay windows, criss-crossed with wooden lathes, that let in a veritable flood of sunshine. Touching a few straggling potted plants, that perched on the window sills, it spilled out over the floor in a warm, pure gold. Outside the windows I could see an empty, spacious terrace, enclosed by a high brick wall like a prison enclave. My eyes returned to the room.

Against one of the walls leaned a huge, old table, flanked by two charcoal burners, and on the table itself I recognized the shapes of two Tibetan butter lamps, necessary items in a place that had no access to electricity.

Other than that, the room was completely empty. I glanced questioningly at the abbot, who had remained standing beside me. He nodded. "We have arrived, let's go in."

Still baffled, I entered. Looking around more carefully this time, I

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discovered that at the far right corner the room opened up onto a small passage-way that led to a second chamber. Both Ame Cheuzang and I moved toward it at the same time.

The immediate, somewhat disappointing impression was that of another bright room, not quite as large as the first. My eyes ran swiftly over the few pieces of furniture, all somehow different and disproportionate, and two windows opening out onto the garden, a door and — fixed themselves on a creature that was just coming in from the terrace.

My first reaction was to flee but fascination and terror kept my eyes rivited on the formidable shape, only my hands started to shake.

"There is nothing to fear, he is harmless." The abbot's voice was firm and reassuring.

Motionless, I continued to stare at the strange being that had stopped in the doorway, and only gradually was I able to absorb the details of his giant frame, overcome as I was by the impact of our confrontation.

He stood well over eight foot tall and was of powerful, muscular build. With the exception of face, hands and feet, which looked as if they had been sculptured out of a light-brown hide, his body was completely covered with thick, reddish fur. His hands resembled a couple of oversized saucers, extending six fingers, capped by long nails that formed hard, claw-like half moons. Yet it was his face that struck me as the most startling feature of all.

Dominated by an enormous, dome-shaped forehead, it had large, triangular eye-lids, that slid down to his cheeks like two fringed patches, and in between it all and slightly out of proportion with the rest, a too small, sunken-in nose and thin mouth criss-crossed the leathery expanse. It was a face like a death-mask, devoid of emotion, of awareness. It was utterly empty.

Suddenly the creature's tail swang forward and he opened his eyes. Although dim, like unpolished glass and obscured by long lashes, they were of unusual size and shade — red and yellow and violet, all blended in one, like the plumage of an exotic bird, and somehow I knew that this wasn't their real color at all but only as it appeared to our limited range of sight.

He was standing right in front of us, but did not seem to be aware of our presence. Slowly and laboriously he walked over to one of the chairs closest to the window and sat down, putting his head on the window sill. At that instant I realized why upon entering the room, the furniture had struck me as rather bizarre. All pieces, from the chairs to the bed, were almost twice their ordinary size in order to accommodate his towering frame.

I don't know how long I stood there, my mind a blank, but soon the questions came pouring in. *Who or what was this weird being, part ape, part monster, part — could it be — man?*

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I turned to the abbot. "This creature — where did you catch it, what is it?" My voice sounded hoarse from excitement.

The abbot stared at the crouched, sleeping figure with an expression of great compassion on his face. "A long time ago he came to us from the stars, but he was different then."

LATER IN the abbot's study, a fantastic tale unfolded itself.

It was the first time that I had been invited to the lama's private apartments, guests being customarily entertained in the official reception rooms of the monastery. Ame Cheuzang valued and guarded his privacy.

A burning brazier had been placed in one of the corners of the room close to a low table and several huge cushions that were arranged around it on the floor. Two silver cups, steaming invitingly with hot buttered tea stood on the table beside a dish filled with warm tsampa flour. The dish was carved out of the largest turquiose slab that I had ever seen; it must have been of inestimable value.

We started our breakfast with the same eagerness as that displayed by the monks earlier in the courtyard. A slow eater, I drank my tea in small, deliberate sips, occasionally taking some tsampa flour. Thus mixed, they produced a pleasantly strange flavor on the palate.

While enjoying my meal, I had time to admire the abbot's exquisite taste. One corner of the room was dominated by his private altar, complete with a small, golden chorten — an exact replica of the gate chortens in the valley — and numerous Buddha and Bodhisattva statues, also of pure gold. Two silver vases, one with peacock feathers, the other with fresh alpine flowers, completed the arrangement. Close to the altar stood a large chest of beautifully carved hardwood, on top on which lay a number of oblong bundles, each wrapped in a silken cloth — Tibetan books the abbot was currently reading. From previous conversations I knew that he kept the most precious pieces of his library in a chest in his own quarters. Above the wooden trunk hung a magnificent, ancient tanka, one of those priceless Tibetan religious paintings that depicted lamas, monasteries and tree-clad landscapes in stunningly bright colors and unsurpassed aesthetic composition. Flanking the tanka, were two huge dance masks, whose painted black eyes stared fiercely down at us, as if wanting to devour our very souls.

Having finished his breakfast, Ame Cheuzang sat back in his cushions and for some time remained immersed in silence. I was still absorbing the unusual impressions from his room, when he finally began to speak.

"About twenty-five years ago, on a late summer afternoon, three other monks and I went for a long walk in the valley. The sun was already quite low in the west and it had started to get cool.

"I had only been at the monastery for a year then, sent there by my guru after three years of isolation in a walled-up cave — the last test in

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my training called 'the meditation of the three years' and aimed at transforming the adept into 'a great voyager,' which in your translation would probably mean 'traveller in the astral.' It had not been easy to readjust to monastic life at that point, but I had no choice, my teacher's wish had to be obeyed.

"We were walking along briskly, enjoying the fresh breeze that came down from the mountains, when suddenly the sky was cut open by a gigantic flash of light. And then it came. A black spot first, then a line, a monstrous sphere — glowing red, roaring, spitting flames. It descended rapidly, obliterated the sky over our heads, hovered there for a few seconds, veered to the right and glided down, landed on its belly some two hundred yards from us. The sound, as the vessel scraped the rocks, was deafening. We stood paralyzed, unable to move or utter a word. Everything had happened so fast.

"The nose of the sphere was drenched in fire, shooting huge flames skyward. The next moment an opening appeared in the hull and out jumped, ran, crawled a dozen or more of the strangest creatures, emitting a high-pitched sound, painful to the ear, and disappearing in all directions. I counted about eleven of them myself; some carrying wounded companions on their backs, others dragging boxes behind them in what appeared a desperate attempt to salvage some of their equipment. It could, of course, also have been provisions.

"The last one to leave the ship was a being taller and broader than the rest. He seemed to have spotted us in the distance, for he started to head straight in our direction, running with slow, jerky movements, bending over and toppling from side to side like a puppet on an unsteady string. It was obvious to us that he was hurt. This was the last I saw before I turned and fled." The abbot paused.

"And what happened next?" I asked impatiently, unable to contain myself.

"My running away must have been an instinctive reaction — our inborn fear of the unknown, I suppose. Although trained to disregard fear as a product of the imagination, I failed to exert control that time," Ame Cheuzang said more to himself than to me. After a short silence he continued. "The others had already left, hurrying back toward the monastery. Suddenly the air detonated with a thundering explosion. I was lifted from the ground and flung behind a large rock. A violent tremor shook the earth, then everything was quiet once more.

"When I eventually dared to get up and look around, the ship was gone — it must have been blown to bits. For a moment I wondered if it hadn't all been a delusion, a treacherous play of the senses, but it was real enough.

"After having recalled my companions, we combed the whole area for survivors.

"We found him half-buried under earth and grit, battered, bleeding,

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yet still alive. There was nothing else to do but carry him as quickly as possible to the monastery.

"Fortunately it was dark when we arrived and nobody saw us enter with our strange load. My predecessor, Angdu Tenzing, gave immediate orders to put up our charge in a rarely used room close to his own quarters and made us swear to absolute secrecy concerning the events we had witnessed."

"Had nobody at the monastery seen the flash or heard the explosion?" I wondered.

"Oh, yes. Although the actual descent of the ship could not have been observed from here, as that part of the valley is obscured from the monastery by hills, the lightning and noise from the detonation were, and I suppose there must have been a great deal of gossiping and guessing going on that evening. Early next morning a delegation of monks arrived at the abbot's apartments, but he explained the incident away as an unusually large meteor that had hit the area, and they were satisfied."

"Did the abbot keep it a secret because he feared a panic?"

"Not so much panic as curiosity and the possible intrusion of the outside world. The proof of extraterrestrial life that had so unexpectedly come his way, took a powerful hold on the abbot's imagination. In a way, he became overly possessive about the discovery, but he was, of course, right in keeping it a secret. Above all, you see, he wanted to protect the alien.

"Our charge seemed to be in great danger of succumbing to his wounds. The abbot and I tended to his cuts and lacerations and put his broken arm and leg in splints, however, he must have sustained internal injuries, for he was unconscious for over a week.

"It was difficult to know how to keep him alive with our limited resources. We sponged his body and saw to it that his lips and mouth were moistened regularly to prevent excessive dehydration, especially as he had developed a low-grade fever. As for the rest, we had to trust to luck.

"After he regained consciousness, the problem of fluid intake solved itself. He settled for a vegetable broth, having first rejected goat's milk, beaten eggs and buttered tea. A couple of days later, when he appeared to be gaining strength, we began to add solid foods. He would carefully smell at whatever was offered and either refuse it by pushing the plate aside or cover it with his enormous hands and wait. Not until he was left alone in the room, did he start to eat. From this we learned two things about him: that he was used to a pure vegetable and fowl diet, or the equivalent — whatever that might have been — on his world, and that eating seemed to be a ritual which had to be performed in complete solitude. It could, of course, also have been that he was simply conforming to a rule which forbade aliens — and that's what we were to him — to be

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present at their meals. We never found out much more about the living habits of his race.

"The day after we had brought the stranger to the monastery, the abbot summoned me to his rooms. He hadn't been able to sleep all night and was very excited, almost agitated, about what had happened. I had never seen him like this before.

"He was convinced that the ship had come from the far reaches of space, indeed, what other explanation could there be. The hundred and one questions as to its origin and purpose had been burning inside him all night, finally showing him a way of how to obtain the answers. That was where I entered into the picture. When he explained his plan to me, it sounded very simple, but in reality it was far from that."

"And what was this plan?" I noticed that my voice sounded tense.

"The abbot wanted me, if at all possible, to immediately establish a telepathic link with our guest and probe his mind on the subconscious level. He also hoped I would be able to tune in on his stream of thought and initiate some kind of nonverbal conversation, once the alien had emerged from his coma.

"Although I knew that the abbot's decision was right, prompted as it was by his desire to help the creature and by his awe of the incredible feat the aliens had accomplished, I was hesitant. Not that I lacked curiosity, in fact it was so strong that it threatened to become all-consuming like the abbot's, but I wasn't sure whether my powers would be able to bridge the enormous gap between us. However, eventually I agreed, realizing that it was the only way of extending a helping hand to him.

"After four days of trial and error, it became clear to me that as long as he remained unconscious, I wouldn't be able to get through to him with conventional methods, and I started to doubt whether there was any chance at all, even with his regaining consciousness. It appeared as if my mind were standing in front of an insurmountable, forbidding wall.

"I was ready to abandon the experiment for the time being, when on the fifth day something unexpected happened. It was close to midnight. The room was very quiet and peaceful, suffused by the warm, golden glow of the butter lamps. I had just taken over the second watch at his bedside and was settling down with a scroll near the window. Looking out into the sky, I must have half-crossed the threshold of wakefulness.

"The emotion that hit me suddenly, possessed an incredible vehemence — unbearable, inhuman in its intensity. It was a cry of fathomless pain without words or sound. He must have suffered terribly.

"That was my first contact. Others that followed were erratic and unpredictable. Gradually, though, I found out that communication was only possible in a certain half-wake state. It also seemed easier if shortly before entering trance, I concentrated on the sky and the stars to the total exclusion of everything else; although why this should have been

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so, I cannot explain.

"During his period of unconsciousness progress was very limited. I would enter that frightening stream of pain and agony, sometimes only to tear myself free, lest my mind should succumb to its primeval force. Once, toward the end, a terrible, desolate feeling of despair and total hopelessness assailed me with such strength that I could not get rid of it for days, despite my extensive training in mind control. His emotions had an extraordinarily contagious effect, very much more so than our own. They displayed a peculiar, mesmerizing quality, from which my mind had extreme difficulty in extricating itself. It seemed almost as if a part of me wished to be held in this vice of utter suffering.

"His subconscious, like ours, was quite clearly aware of everything that was happening to him, although he lay in deep coma.

"Day by day I tried to put additional bits of information together, like pieces of an intricate jigsaw puzzle. It appeared that physical or mental pain was a thing unknown to his race and that he was facing them for the first time. Quite possibly, both had been eliminated from his people's life-experience many generations ago by a technology advanced beyond our imagination. I presume it must have been by drugs or other physical means, as advanced techniques of mind control would have come to his aid no matter in what situation he found himself.

"I soon understood, too, that all his and consequently his species' emotional reactions and feelings, positive as well as negative, were of an intensity unknown and almost unbearable to man. It was only due to my past training in the mental disciplines that I could stand being exposed to such a furor of passions for any length of time at all. The same held true of the gaze of his eyes, once he regained consciousness. Although fascinating like flames, I was seldom able to meet their stare for longer than a few seconds; their piercing look was far too smoldering and overpowering to endure.

"When he came out of the coma, it took over a week of concentrated effort to establish only the most rudimentary of telepathic communications. I am sorry to say, I never became very proficient in it. Our conversations, if one could call them that, were rather complicated and extremely laborious.

"As our visitor had no ears and never even tried to speak, I had already gathered that his kind most likely communicated by telepathy alone. I came to the conclusion that the high-pitched cries we had heard when the creatures fled the ship, were produced through a peculiar air passage in the nose and resorted to only in extreme danger. But, of course, I may have been wrong. I think that sound must have been an atavism, pointing to the use of a phonetic language before evolution opted for another method. In their case, vocalization had probably been produced by the nasal passages instead of by the voice box of the

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larynx as with us. However, eventually the actual sounds most likely degenerated into a meaningless by-product of some kind of distress signal sent out telepathically.

"Gestures, although he seemed to understand them, he ignored and never used himself. I think they might have been a taboo with his own people.

"Telepathic exchange was probably so difficult because of a basic difference in neuronal structure and therefore transmission. At least, this is what I suspect. It is not easy to theorize, hampered as we are by our ignorance regarding the mechanics of telepathy.

"He used both image and abstract content transmission. Unfortunately, his brain processes were more than twice the speed of ours, and this disparity proved a well-nigh insuperable obstacle. I would miss most of his messages and his struggle to interpret what to him must have been an endless chain of stammerings. Extremely trying and exhausting repetitions were therefore unavoidable.

"There was no doubt that he wished to be friends with us, but in the beginning he showed no particular interest in exchanging information, in fact displayed remarkably little curiosity about our world. From this I suspected that he most likely knew all he needed to know about Earth already.

"During the months I spent with him, except toward the very end, he also seemed basically reserved, even shy, and disinclined to participate in long exchanges.

"I still remember quite vividly how I got my first message, an attempt at reassurance and an offer of help, across to him. His immediate reaction was surprise and then — a smile. Yes, this thin-lipped, grave face actually smiled, and it was one of the gentlest smiles I had ever seen. The answer, or more correctly, that part of the answer I was able to catch, was very simple. He was grateful for what we had done for him — but help we could not, science on our world not being advanced enough yet. How he could have known, is beyond my comprehension."

AT THIS point the abbot interrupted the narrative, rose from his cushions and walked over to one of the two windows in the small study. He looked thoughtful and remote.

I welcomed the break and got up as well in order to stretch my legs.

It was hard to sort out the conflicting thoughts that were racing through my mind. Coming face to face with an alien from outer space in the flesh, was more than I had bargained for. In fact, I felt rather disquieted. Having set out to study paranormal phenomena at first hand, I had wound up with proof of alien space travel to Earth. The incongruity was too startling and yet at the same time tremendously exciting. Of course, there was a great irony in all this, of which the abbot had been perfectly aware from the beginning, when he took me to that hideout

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within the monastery's walls. The proof would only exist for me alone, as I could never communicate what I had seen to anyone else, short of being considered a crank. Yet, somehow the realization that I would have to keep silent, did not bother me.

Glancing over the abbot's shoulder toward the distant, golden-white peaks of Tibet, I couldn't help thinking what an ideal place this was for guarding secrets, any secrets — past, present and future. No other spot on Earth could compare with the stronghold vastness of the Himalayas and the deserts that stretched out and away from it to the east and west. I also fell to wondering whether any of the alien's companions, who had escaped into the mountains, had ever been seen or heard of again.

Ame Cheuzang turned around and nodded toward the view outside. "To think that it all happened here," he said, as if having read my mind.

"Yes, and somehow it seems the only appropriate setting. Did he ever show any interest in looking for the other survivors, Rimpoche?"

"No, not really. When he recovered from his injuries, we took him down to the valley and the scene of the accident. He seemed to recognize the spot but made no attempt to follow his comrades into the mountains, although all he had to do, was to pick up the provisions we had prepared for him and leave. Instead, he turned around and walked back with us to the monastery. Later he explained to me that his duty lay elsewhere, and that he had a more important task to perform. Not until the day he left did I understand what he meant."

"Left? But he is still here!" I exclaimed in astonishment.

"Yes, well—he is still here, of course, but only in a manner of speaking." The abbot looked at me steadily, then averted his eyes. After a few moments he returned to his seat and I followed suit.

"It was soon after the excursion to the valley," he continued, "that we arranged the two special rooms and the roof garden for him, which you have seen. It looked as if he intended to remain with us for an indefinite period of time, and we wanted to make his life as comfortable as possible, given the restrictions.

"He would get severe attacks of despondency, and the feeling of utter loneliness and rage at his helplessness sometimes overwhelmed him — and me, if I happened to tune in on his thoughts. However, I soon discovered that he appreciated my visits and seemed to have a certain need for them. Perhaps our communications, limited though they were, helped him to clarify in his own mind what to do about the strange situation, in which he found himself. He became less secretive, and week by week I was able to add more pieces to my ever-growing puzzle.

"He came from a faraway world, possibly from another galaxy, I couldn't be sure, as the images I received of the location were totally

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unfamiliar and confusing to me.

"His home planet, larger and older than ours, had about the same characteristics as Earth, with the exception that all mountains were grouped together around the equator, forming a jagged belt that reached high into the clouds. The rest consisted of vast green plains, interspersed with several large, shallow seas. His kin lived to a very advanced age — centuries to our way of thinking — without ever showing any signs of physical change. Once they had reached mature adulthood, their physique remained unaltered until the day they died. When their life span was nearing its end, his people reproduced, and, as soon as the new generation had grown up, which appeared to have taken only the equivalent of about one hundred Earth years, they went up to the mountains to await the end. Strange as it may seem, the time of reproduction and death had been built into their genes and could not be altered. And as all births were twin births, the population always remained constant."

Ame Cheuzang coughed and pulled his robe closer about him.

"They seemed to have led an ordinary and rather protected life until the day when a tramp star appeared in the skies. When it was proven beyond doubt that the intruder was on a straight collision course with their sun, survey ships were sent out to find another world. One of these was successful. It located an uninhabited planet that answered all their needs, and his people made immediate preparations to evacuate the whole population as quickly as possible and transfer them to their new home.

"His had been the first ship of a newly built fleet, sent out to establish a base on the virgin planet and maintain two-way contact between the old and new worlds. A senior member of the space force, our guest was chosen to be the leader of the expedition. Whether his mission was successful or not, the other space-liners would follow after a specified interval, as the threatening star was blazing closer fast, and time was running out.

"Far out in interstellar or intergalactic space they discovered that something was terribly wrong. The vessel was off course, shooting into uncharted space with its communication systems out of order. A fatal error in the construction of the automatic as well as manual pilots had occurred — in their vehicle as well as in all the others, waiting to take off. It was a deadly discovery. Not only would they be doomed to drift aimlessly in space, but the same defect, through some faulty connection in the central computer, would eventually cause the space craft to explode. As the section involved was sealed off and inaccessible, repairs could not be effected.

"The ships had been built too fast. It seemed that their's had never really been a space-faring race, confining themselves to the occasional scout and trader vessels. The emergency had been too great a strain on

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their technology, although they had mastered faster-than-light travel.

"Just before the crucial stage was reached, the ship sighted our solar system, and by an incredible feat of out-maneuvering the auto-pilot, they were able to get the vessel into orbit around Earth and descend. None too soon, as we had seen. The crew was saved from death, but their race was heading towards certain extinction in the vast expanses of space. And what was far more tragic, unwittingly towards extinction at their own hands.

"This preyed on his mind day and night, and I slowly began to understand that it was the fate of his people that filled him with such terrifying anguish and despair, not his own, as I had at first surmised.

"With time he became more and more pre-occupied and restless, even resentful — in a gentle, tired sort of way — of my attempts at initiating communication. He had developed the habit of sitting up all night, gazing at the stars, and sleeping during the day, when his world was extinct to his gaze.

"From the few glimpses he allowed me, I realized that he was fighting a distressingly fierce battle within himself, a battle where determination and fear were the relentless opponents.

"Then one early evening, it was all over.

"We had been sitting together silently for about an hour or more, when he suddenly turned to me, his eyes shining brighter than ever before and his thoughts rushing across my mind, clear and lucid for the first time."

I have to go home to inform my people of the error in the calculations. The other ships must be saved. There is still time. No one has ever done this before and I may not succeed, but it is the only way left. Thank you for everything, you were my friend. I am going now.

"He took my hand firmly in his and — suddenly there was no room anymore, no walls, no roof; for a split second I saw the whole monastery below me from a bird's eye view — a brown castle embedded in blue mountain folds — then the Earth, immense and round, half-moon dark and half-moon gold — the stars rapidly moving closer . . .

"A feeling of fear, then relief and elation, then of parting, all of them not mine, and again — the roof, the walls, the room, and myself lying in a chair, gropingly trying to get back into this world, and on the floor the huge body of the alien slumped together in a heap — a shell without a soul." The abbot sighed deeply. "That moment in space was the greatest experience of my life. I had learned in a second what absolute trust was, and absolute freedom.

"You see, he was afraid, so much so, that he needed someone to help him over the first terrifying hurdle by his presence — and I was able to do this one thing for him. Maybe he also wanted to show me a fraction of the unbelievable beauty of the universe as a parting gift.

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"Since then we have been taking care of the frame he left behind. It performs all its bodily functions like an automaton and has not aged in all the years that have passed. Who knows, one day he may claim it back, although the chances are that this will never happen. Still, I have picked two young monks who are assisting me in caring for his discarded body and they, together with my successor, will be left in charge of it when I am no more." The abbot paused, looking straight ahead. "I have often wondered where his spirit might be roaming now."

"What became of the other creatures, the ones that took refuge in the mountains?"

"Who knows? They were never seen again. I doubt that they could have survived in our climate without adequate shelter and access to food."

A long silence settled between us. I was deeply shaken. My thoughts went to that giant body we had left sleeping in its gilded cage, a body that had housed such heroism and so much humanity, although it was not of this Earth.

"I wonder if he ever made it?" Somehow I must have said it out aloud, although it had only been meant as a thought.

Ame Cheuzang's answer came slowly, he seemed suddenly very tired.

"A few weeks after he had left, I was walking early one morning in the valley. The sun had not yet risen and one or two solitary stars were still shining in the sky.

"I intended to do my mental exercises and sat down on a rock, progressively emptying my mind of all thoughts. Suddenly, like lightning out of a clear blue sky, my whole being was seized and shaken by an unsurpassable joy and a flaming emotion of triumph. Its power hurled me into a deep unconsciousness.

"Waking up was like stepping out of a circle of tremendous accomplishment. I knew at once that this experience had not arisen from within my own self, such intensity of sensation had only been mine during dealings with our strange friend." The lama's words trailed off.

"Although I did not doubt the abbot's word, I had great difficulty in accepting the fantastic mental feat the alien had accomplished.

"He had peeled off his body like a skin, existing as free, intelligent energy and had projected this to the farthest reaches of the universe. Of all the out-of-the-body experiences I had read about, this was the most astounding and spectacular, ever. And apparently by any standards, even an initiated high lama's. It was too awesome to contemplate."

I shook my head. "Then you believe he really succeeded in getting back and warning his people and that he sent you a message of his achievement?"

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"I like to think he did, because he deserved to. He was a very brave man, the bravest I have ever known." ■

Bio-Sketch

Thea Carvel

A graduate in clinical psychology, I have worked for a number of years in the psychiatric field as a psychotherapist, social worker and counselling administrator. Lately I have taken up creative writing on a full-time basis—with SF as my true love. In between short stories, my typewriter is at present also struggling with a SF novel. I am married and look after husband, house and a large, jungle-like garden, filled with tall trees and a bird-bath that attracts cardinals and jays.

In addition to being a voracious reader, I am also consumed by a passion for travel. I have criss-crossed this planet from Afghanistan to Bora-Bora and from Iceland to the southernmost tip of Argentina. But none of these journeys has ever compared with the first trip I took through my telescope and found myself suddenly confronted with the awe-inspiring rings of Saturn. There and then I knew that it was space where I really wanted to voyage. This being impractical, however, I decided on the next best thing instead: to roam it in my imagination. Needless to say, I am a Gemini.

I also like opera and dolphins and collect shells.

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DAEMON

PART 4

Stephen & Chip Fabian

Aboard ship. Guardian has sensed the images that we have seen of the sacred cavern, and has alerted Gundar, my second in command, to get the rest of my fighting men to the beach at once.

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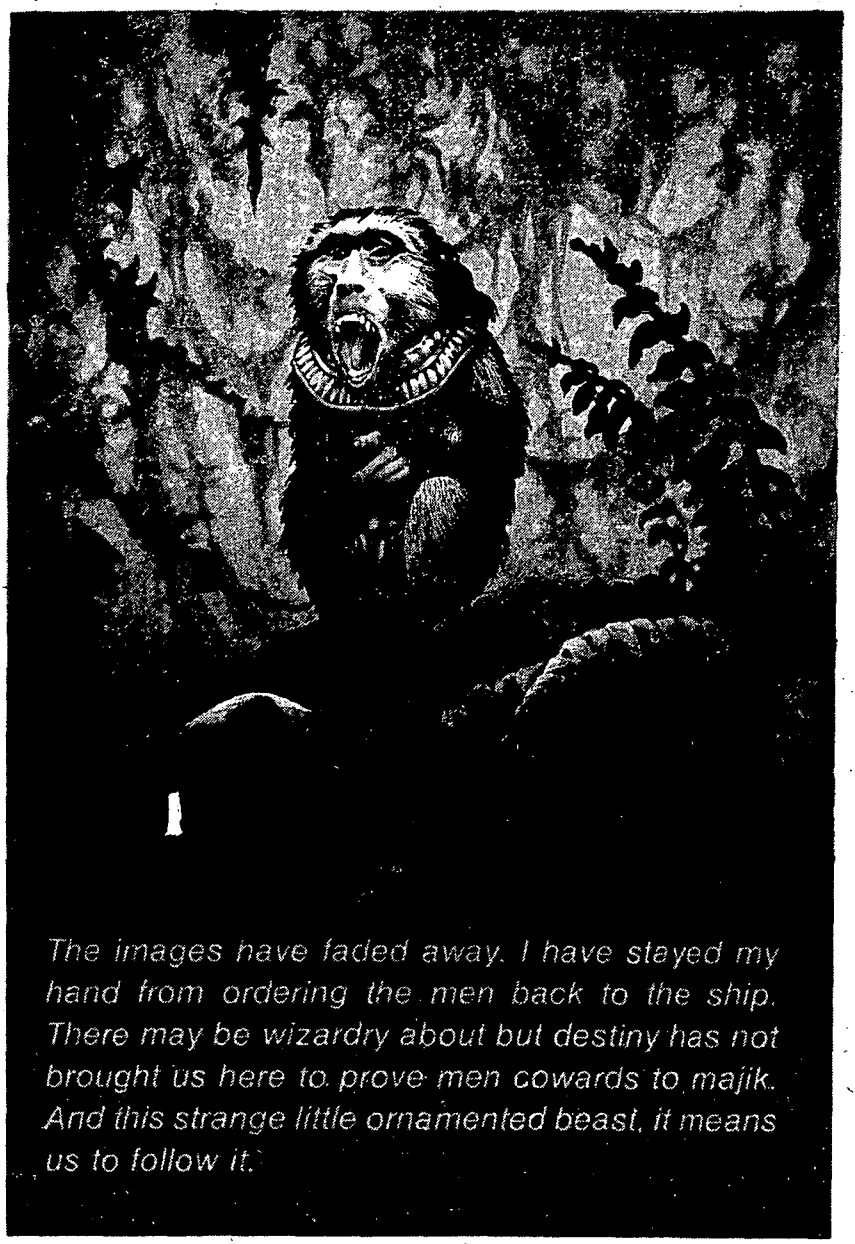

The images have faded away. I have stayed my hand from ordering the men back to the ship. There may be wizardry about but destiny has not brought us here to prove men cowards to majik. And this strange little ornamented beast, it means us to follow it.

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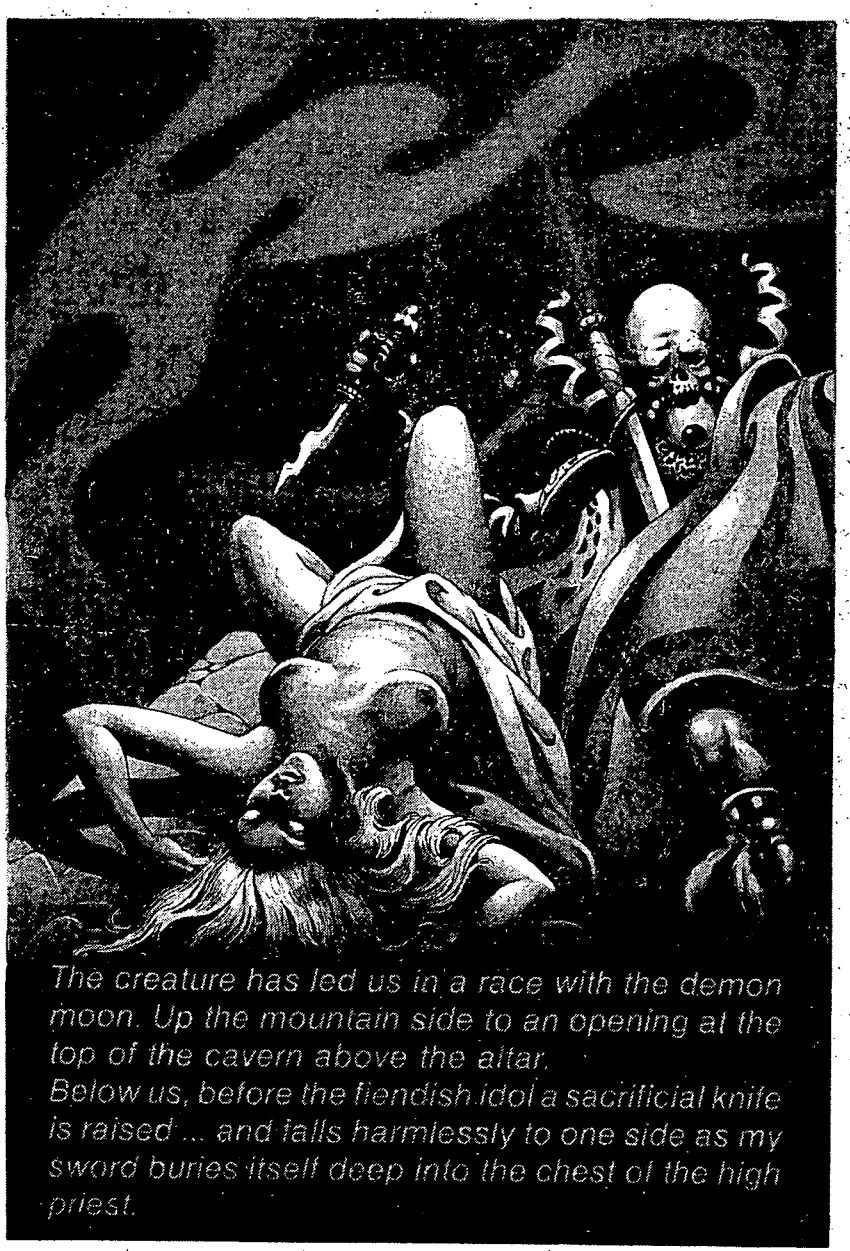

The creature has led us in a race with the demon moon. Up the mountain side to an opening at the top of the cavern above the altar.
Below us, before the fiendish idol a sacrificial knife is raised ... and falls harmlessly to one side as my sword buries itself deep into the chest of the high priest.

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And as I leap down to retrieve my sword, the fleeing, screaming savages give signal for my men to attack the entrance. In moments havoc rages. The air is rent with the fury of our battle cry. Over the moans of the dying, an inhuman cry from another part of the cavern fills the air, a wail part fear, part farewell. And from the Altar the girl screams out fearfully, "STAR MOT-ES!"

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A MESSAGE FROM THE MEDIUM

Illustrated by Ambrose

by Israel O'Rourke

Could God or Devil do it up like this?

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I REMEMBER it was July 4, 1876, 'cause Pa said, "It was exac'ly a hundred years ago today that our nation was declared itself independent and free." There was no fireworks or wild celebrations for us, 'cause our nearest neighbors was in Lincoln, Missouri, and that was twenty miles away and people didn't travel no twenty miles through woods and swamp just to set off fireworks and hear speeches. We had too much work to do. Too much trees to clear, too much land to till, pigs and chickens to feed and take care of and clean up after, too much vegetables to tend to and water to fetch.

But Pa, he didn't have no education to speak of, but he was sure a smart man. He couldn't read nor write, he didn't have to, but he knew how to keep a family together and make us feel like Americans. That day he said, "We're going to *not* work this afternoon. We're going to have us a picnic to celebrate the centennial of the birth of this great nation."

Of course I was mighty pleased not to have to chase them pigs for a day, and Ma and Wilbur and Essie was happy too. So Ma packed up some chicken and some bread, yams and hog jowls, and berry preserves I don't know how she found the time to make, and she took the big colored blanket we had bought over to Lincoln the last time we was there, and we took Joe, our nigger who wasn't a slave no more since the War but had been Pa's nigger since before me or Wilbur or Essie was born. Pa liked him and they respected each other so he came with us when they moved to Missouri, and we all of us went a little ways to where Pa and Joe had cleared a lot of trees and we made ourselves a picnic lunch.

Oh, we had fun that day. Wilbur and Essie chasing after me, trying to catch me, yelling "Buster! Buster!"—and me chasing them and Pa and Joe whittling and Ma humming and singing happy tunes. Even if nothing more had happened, that day would be one I'd never forget, we had so much fun.

By and by it got to dusk, and we gathered up all the stuff save for what we left for the birds and varmints—"It's their country too," Pa said, and Ma smiled but I didn't understand—and we went back to home.

You couldn't tell there was nothing different just by looking at the outside. To us it was just home, but I hear homes just like it, called "log cabins." Well, it was made of logs, all right, but it wasn't no cabin, it was our great big one-room house, was what it was. And like I said, you couldn't tell there was nothing strange, and I'm pretty good at seeing when things ain't ordinary right.

Pa heaved open the door, which had a notion to stick every now and again, and we all went in. It was bright and cheerful inside. It took us all a half a second to realize that we hadn't left the fire burning, nor the lamps burning, so where was the light coming from?

There was a box in the middle of the room, and the light was coming from there.

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Nobody moved excepting me. Without knowing what I was about, I backed up against the wall, making little growly noises in my throat.

It was a big square box and it stood on four short little legs. There were two things sticking out of the top like two long skinny feathers you sometimes seen Injuns wearing down to the trading post in Lincoln. But the part that made the light was the front. It was a big square thing like a painting picture, but it was moving. Black lines ran up and up and up after the other, and gray and white flashes like lightning zig-zagged across it. It was making a hissing noise like a light rain hitting the roof or maybe hail on the leaves.

"What is it?" Ma whispered.

"I don't know," said Pa and he slowly went towards it.

"You be careful!" Ma said.

Pa reached out, real slow, and just lightly touched the top and then jumped back. It didn't bite him or do nothing, so he touched it again, a little longer. "It's wood," he said. Then he put his finger on the part that was making all the light and lines. "Glass," he said. "I can't feel the lines, just the glass."

"Maybe it's a winder," said Nigger Joe, who'd seen a lot since the time he was took from across the ocean when he was just a baby.

"Winder into what?" Pa asked. "Can't be no winder into this box cause there can't be nothin' in this box would make these lines." I told you, Pa ain't had no education, but he was smart anyhow.

"Maybe it's the Trojan Hoss," said Wilbur, who had high falutin' ideas since he once spent a whole day in talking to a traveling Perfesser over to Lincoln one day. "Maybe they's something inside for us to have."

"Uh-uh," said Pa, looking all over at the box. "Ain't no way to open it. Ain't no way to see inside, 'cept through that winder."

Essie, who always had as much sense as a squirrel, went over to the box and said, "What's them things sticking out with them—what's them?"

"Them's numbers," said Wilbur proudly, recognizing them. Everyone was all gathered round the box 'cept me. I wasn't about to go near it, no sir!

So Essie sticks out her hand and says, "What if I put it on a different number?" and before you could say Jack Robinson, she grabs ahold of the knobby thing with the numbers and she turned it.

And then we saw this little man standing on the other side of the winder.

Well Ma let out a shriek like the time she almost walked right into that hornet's nest and did take a sting on the hand.

Everybody started talking at once, even the little man in the box. "Shut up!" Pa roared. "Hear what he's sayin'!"

The little man was wearing some awful funny clothes. He was saying something like "Moredok tors recommend for paynfulliching of hem-

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meroydulltishoos . . ."

Essie got down and pushed her face real close into the winder and yelled, "Hey there, little man. Can you hear me? Hey, can you see me?" But the little man just kept on a-chatterin' about a "prepparayshin," or something. Then all of a sudden he was gone and Essie shot back like she was a straw in the wind as a cat was all of a sudden sitting on the other side of the glass and he was *singin'* "Meow, meow, meow!" I ain't ever heard no cat sing and neither did no one else, and I can tell you we was all real scared, real scared, indeed.

Ma started praying, she said, "Oh, Lord, save us, dear Lord, save us."

And Pa shook his head. He was about the smartest man I think I ever knew, smarter than any of them perfessers with all their schoolin', 'cause he shook his head and he says to Ma, "Don't you be a-beggin' the Lord for help. There ain't nothing here to hurt us. We should all of us be prayin' in thanks."

"Thanks for what?" asks Ma.

"For this gift of the Lord," says Pa. "He seen we work hard, we're good people. I believe He's rewardin' us by giving us these here people and whatnot in this box to learn us His ways."

"Then," says Essie, "He sure do have some pretty strange ways, 'cause lookie."

We all looked, and what we seen in that box was unbelievable. Hundreds—zillions, maybe—of men was runnin' all over a field with guns and stuff and such and what I never seen and was killin' and stompin' each other like there was no tomorrow.

"There is both good and bad in this world," Pa said, real solemn, like when he reads from the Bible about Jesus on Christmas and Easter. "I reckon the Lord wants us to see all of it. Even if we don't understand, well, I guess we ain't supposed to, I mean, after all, we's just His poor ignorant children. But this is here for a reason, and I'm going to make sure that someone be a-lookin' into it all the time." He musta been real moved, for save at Bible-reading time I don't recall Pa ever speakin' so much seriousness at one time.

"Maybe," says Wilbur, who since he spent all that day talking to that perfesser been storin' some mighty strange ideas in his head. "Maybe that ain't a gift from the Lord. Maybe that *is* the Lord!"

"What?" Pa said, real surprised.

"I don't mean," said Wilbur, "the Lord Jesus, Himself, but maybe a... *infestation,* a *part* of Himself."

"This is too much for us to know," said Pa. "But that this is from God I'll not doubt. Now let us pray in thanksgivin'."

So everyone got down, and Pa, in his Sunday-readin'voice, he says, "Dear Lord, what you have given us, the box with the winder and all them little people inside, we accept with our hearts full of thanks. We

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don't rightly know just yet what you mean for us to do with it, but we gonna look through it until your meanin' becomes clear, if that is your will. Amen." No, Pa wasn't one to argue much with the Lord. I seen him once shoot a bear what got close enough to knock his hat off with a swipe of its paw, and I seen him once dive into a swoled river to rescue a little baby fawn, but when it come to the Lord, Pa sure stood aside and let Him have His way, no questions asked.

"It's time to go to sleep," Ma said, and if there was a fitter woman in the world to be the mate of Pa, I ain't never come across her. "The Lord didn't give us this gift for us to ignore the chickens and the pigs and the chores."

There was now two little women on the other side of the winder talking about soup.

"You're right," Pa said. "But I think someone's gotta sit here and be watchin' for a message all the time, an' that means *all night,* too."

"How about Buster?" Wilbur said, pointing to me. "He don't do nothing but walk around all night anyway, an' he allus naps during the day every time he gets a spare five minutes."

"Now, don't you be making fun of the Lord, boy," Pa said. "You know that even if Buster saw something important he wouldn't understand it nohow."

"But, Mass' John," Nigger Joe said, real quietlike. He still called Pa "Mass" or "Massa" even though for years Pa been trying to get him not to. "If the Lord give this family the gift, then he know 'bout Buster. He know 'bout the work we all got to do. He know we gonna hafta let Buster do the watchin' sometimes."

Pa was smart enough to take good advice even when it come from just a nigger, which is what Joe was, though he was family, too. "You be right, Joe," he said. "All right, Buster, you be watchin' them people—"

"Angels," says Essie.

"Angels, then," says Pa. "An' if they say something you think important, why you just wake me up and let me know, hear?"

I don't need much sleep nohow, so it was no great trouble for me to sit in front of the box all night and watch the people—or angels—or whatever they was, living in there. Mostly I wondered at how they all fitted in there, so many of them. And all of them different rooms and even the outsides that was fitted in that box!

I think they musta been angels, cause they talked about things I ain't heard anybody speak of: "toothpayste," "automobeels," "deetergint," "mycrowayve ovens," "hawa-ee," "pleezdontsqeezethesharman," and such stuff were talked about by a lot of different people in between other people—who I realized was the same people in different places for longer times than the people who talked about the "sharman."

I could tell some differences: the people in the long parts talked to each other, an' sometimes they musta said something funny, 'cause I

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could hear other people laughin'. The sharman people talked right to me—to me, Buster!—or if they talked to each other, someone else would come out and talk to me. And another thing—I mean, I sat there all the night, and I picked up a lot—the long parts, with the same people?—these was "shows." Now I know what "shows" are, for every two or three years Pa would take Ma to Lincoln or even Red River to see a "show" and come back and tell us all about it. And I know these was "shows" cause someone would say "The So-and-So *Show*" which they didn't for the sharmans. The people in the "shows" called the sharmans "komershals," an' they always promised me "We'll be right back after these komershals," and they was and most of them promised to see me next week.

Well, let me tell you that by the time the sun come up an' the rest of the family got up, my head was just plain spinning around. In that night I seen little people singing and dancing, laughing and crying, loving and killing, riding around in carts *without horses*, eating and drinking an' being good an' being mean, talking and running an' jumping and doing stuff that I can't begin to describe. I seen cities the likes of which I never thought could be, an' crowds of more people than I ever seen in my whole life all put together, just standing in one place. Why, I even seen a man who they said was the President of the United States of America! Him and the Lord musta been real good friends for him to be able to go on Presidentin' an' still be in the box!

At breakfast, Pa said, "I been thinkin' before I gone to sleep last night."

"Couldn't hardly sleep for the noise and the light," Ma grumbled.

"That's a *price we pay for the Lord's indulgence*," said Pa. "What I was thinkin' is that as we got to have someone in front of the box all the time, I oughta set up a *skedgeral*."

"What's that?" asked Essie.

"First, Missy, you cover your bosoms," Ma said, for Essie's shift was all open in the front, an' her bosoms was practically out in the open air for all to see. She was newly ripened into full blossoming womanhood, as I heard Ma say. "An' you, Wilbur," Ma goes on, "you keep your eyes offa your sister. Tain't right behavior for neither of you."

"Sorry, Ma," they both said, turning real red, the two of them.

"If I might continue," said Pa, a mite vexed at bein' interrupted. "A skedgeral is where a different person gets to look at the box for the same time every day. This way, there's always someone to see an' learn whatever the Lord wants us to know, but only one person at a time ain't at work."

"Who's in front of the box could mend or peel taters too," said Ma.

"I ain't peeling no taters!" said Wilbur, real mad.

"You do," said Pa, real madder himself by now, "what I tell you. The Lord didn't put that box here for your ennertainment, but to *learn*

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from. An' one o' the things you is gonna learn is to lissen to orders from me, from your Ma, and *even* from that box. Now, no more! This's an important task the Lord has appointed us to, I don't know why, but we are gonna do it right! Is that clear?"

It musta been real clear, for nobody said nothing. "Good," Pa said, quieten-downed. "Here's the skedgeral. Ma, you be watchin' it for two hours, from eight to ten in the morning." Pa had this watch that he knew how to tell time from, an' he was real proud of it. "Essie, you from ten 'til noon. Joe, you from noon 'til two, Wilbur from two to four, an' me from four 'til dinnertime. Then I figure we can all watch an' learn together 'till bedtime, then Buster can watch all night. Anybody got a question?"

Of course there wasn't no questions. When Pa talks that long at one time, even if he talk *Chinee*, you don't ask no questions at all.

ONCE THEY started the skedgeral, I knew what everyone saw, an' there was a few good reasons for this. For one, everyone talked about what they seen; for two, I was often in the house when someone else was watching the box; and for three, a while later I watched the box all day myself so I seen all the "shows" that everyone else seen.

The first day, as every day for the next few weeks, Ma was first. After she cleared up the breakfast table she took herself a chair, some mending and darning, and sat herself down in front of the box. In her two hours there was four "shows" called *Will to Survive; Ellen Cromwell: Woman; Lovers and Losers;* and *To Live My Life.* These all showed women doing lots of things: being doctors, an' wives who didn't do no housework, an' all kinds of strange doin's. But what they mostly did, was, they walked around "in love" all the time. Sometimes happy, sometimes sad, but all they did was laugh or cry about love all the time. A lot of the women loved different men, and so help me, *went to bed* with men that wasn't their husbands! Well, I can tell you that Ma near fell over dead when she saw this for the first time. An' even the women who were unhappy in love, they wore nice clean dresses and jewels, had Kings' and Queenses' houses to live in, lots of friends and never once did they lift a finger to dust or mend or cook. None of them ever had to go to the outhouse in the middle of a cold night.

An' all of them had a whole mess of men chasing after them telling them that they loved them, an' giving them gifts an' presents. At first, Ma was confused by the "komershals," until she realized that what these little people was doing was showing her all kinds of things she shoulda had but didn't. The "shows" showed her *other* women with all them fine things, and the "komershals" talked to *her* askin' *Ma* why *she* didn't have them same things. Well, now, Ma was never one to take nothing lying down, but she knew all her life, I could tell, that hard work and simple rewards was all she could expect from life, and she accepted

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it. But now, I'd seen her watch some little women all fancied up in purls and diamonds and then look at her own dress which she had for four years, and she'd look at some woman eating with a "servint" giving her the food an' a handsome man eating with her while Ma was peeling taters, an' she'd stop every now and so often an' sigh a sigh.

We learned to tell time by the "shows," so Essie was never late for her two hours. She also had four "shows": *Mystery Cashbox; Prize Palace; Name It and Keep It;* an' *Krazy Kwestions for Kash.* All of these "shows" had people on of all ages and some dressed not as nice as the women on Ma's "shows" an' mostly they would answer questions or spin wheels or do something, an' they'd almost all of them win things. Money, mostly. Zillions an' zillions of dollars at a time! Furs, jewelry, fancy furniture, trips *through the air,* them horseless carts—all the things them women in Ma's "shows" had, but of course, they didn't watch each other's "shows," so Ma didn't know where them women got their stuff an' Essie didn't know what they did with it all. But she was amazed at the bigness of the dollars that was just *gived away!* We never had more than two or three dollars together as long as I can remember, an' here someone would answer a question and get *ten thousand dollars!!* That was almost a millyun! Sometimes, Essie couldn't breathe she was so rocked. At night she'd walk around saying, "Hankaron broke Bay Brooth's record. Kathrin Hepbern won the academee ward," an' things like that, which were the answers to some of the questions. What any of them meant, nobody knew, not even Essie. But she'd watch them people getting millyuns and zillions of dollars an' I could tell she was thinking about things, too.

Nigger Joe's two hours come next. He had two "shows" every day, *Cohen, Hernandez and White;* an' *Aggie's Place.* Both were very funny "shows" from the lots of laughing that kept coming from the box. The first "show" was about three lawyers, a Jewboy, a Mexican, an' a nigger, although the nigger was called "black" but his name was "White." Didn't that get Joe all confused for a spell! But, what he saw in a short time was that even though "White" was a nigger, he was treated just like anybody else. Better, even, cause he had most of the funny things to say and more of the laughs. He wore a nice, though strange suit, lived in a big house with a pretty, nice-dressed nigger gal, an' had Cohen and Hernandez an', everyone else call him "Fred" or "Mr. White" or even "sir!" There was this one young white boy on the "show" who *worked for* White! The other "show" was about a saloon where all kinds of people went to spend a funny hour every day. Out of seven people who come in every day, three was niggers, an' they was *served,* and they *stood right in front* with the white folks, an' everything! From right after the first "show," Joe wasn't the same. He was a lot quieter even than usual, an' I used to see him taking long walks all alone and talking to himself.

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Wilbur stopped complaining about the peeling and the potscrubbing soon after he was innerduced to his shift. His was three "shows," two half-hour ones called *Disco Cops* an' *On Campus*, an' an hour one called *The Foz: Private Eye*. The first one was about two young sheriffs, I think they was, though to this day I don't know what "Disco" or "Cops" is. These two fellers would run around after criminals, fight a lot, drink a lot, shoot a lot, an' be in the company of a lot of pretty girls in short skirts an' "beekeenees" an' things that looked like Ma's and Essie's nightshifts 'cept there was a lot more of them showing than Ma and Essie! The next one was about some kind of schoolhouse where boys and girls mostly about Wilbur's age all lived together an' the girls all ran around in clothes that left their arms an' legs and bosoms all sticking out. An' more often than not, the boys an' girls would sleep together in the same beds like on Ma's "shows," but they was younger and showed more of their bodies an' talked about it more. The last show was about a man who pretty women would come to to solve the murders of their fathers or uncles an' after a hour of shooting an' chasing an' fighting, *The Foz: Private Eye* would be invited into these women's houses an' they would have nothin' on but underclothes an' they all had big bosoms, too. Wilbur's eyes used to bulge out of his head like you'd think he had just sat on a sharp rock. Yes sir, he soon stopped complaining about the peeling! Since I was more 'ceptive than the resta the family, I noticed that Wilbur was lookin' at Essie like he looked at them girls in the box, more an' more.

Pa would work like a demon all day to get his work all done so he could spend his time in front of the box. When he come in, there was a two hour "show" called *The News Tonite*.

Fires, murders, wars, arrests, dirty air an' water, bad "pollytishuns," disease and sickness, "fammen," unrest, "inflayshun," "revvaloo-shuns," all bad, bad, bad, bad news. Pa would get awful depressed sometimes, an' if I was in the house with him he'd put his hand on my head an' shake it real gentle, an' say, "You know, Buster, I think this is the Lord's way of telling us we just better stay here in our cabin in these woods an' just live our lives an' just be clean, decent, honest Christian folks an' not have no truck with the outside world." An' I, of course, would silently agree with him.

At supper, they mostly keeped their own shows to themselves, 'cept for certain stuffs, but talked about what they all had in common, mostly the "komershals."

"What's a tam-pon?" Wilbur would ask.

An' Ma, who had a inkling, would change the subject by saying, "I'd sure like one o' them *washin' ma-sheens* that does all the work for you."

Pa would talk to Joe about saws that work by themselves, an' Essie would babble on about all kinds of face makeup and such. Then we'd all

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sit for two more hours together an' watch the box.

Every night of the week had different "shows" at that time. They was different, but all the same. Like when I watched by myself, they was all the "So-an'-So Show" with "So-an'-So" bein' a funny man or woman or a singer or a dancer or all three. There was singing an' dancing an' joke-telling a lot of which none of us could unnerstand.

Each night at bedtime when they'd all get up an' try to sleep with the light an' the noise by turning their beds away from the box an' as near the wall as possible, an' I'd take my turn sitting in front of the box, Pa would say, "The Lord sure do act in mysterious ways," or he'd say, "Who can fathom the ways of the Lord?" or something like that.

THIS WENT on for four whole weeks. The little people in the box came and went, came and went, singing, dancing, joking, fighting, dying—right on *skedgeral.*

An' it probably would have keeped on a whole lot longer hadn't it been for the changes that started when Nigger Joe got killed.

I didn't see this myself, but I heard enough bits an' pieces from here an' there to put the whole story together like it really happened.

This is what happened. Joe had just watched his "shows" an' there wasn't no chores that needed doing so he took himself a walk. He walked a little farther than he shoulda, an' come out on the trail what passes for a road about three miles from our house. Then he had the bad luck to meet four or five men on horses, men who had owned slaves up 'til ten years before an' didn't at all like people of Joe's color.

"Hey, you," called one of them when they seen Joe. "Hey, you, *nigger!*"

For the first time in his life, Joe held up his head in front of a white man who wasn't Pa. "Don't you call me that," he said.

"What?" asked the man.

"I said, don't you call me no nigger," Joe said. "My name is Joe and if you have a need to talk to me, which I don't think you do, you call me Joe. You don't call me nigger. I ain't no nigger. I'm a man."

Well, if that didn't beat all for these men. One of them got down off his horse cursing and swinged at Joe's head with a rifle stock. An' damn my soul if good ol' Joe didn't haul off an' knock the man flat on his arse! I'm sad at what I have to say 'cause I loved Nigger Joe like we all loved him, an' us calling him Nigger Joe didn't mean we liked him no less, because that was his name, but those men filled Joe up with so many bullets you couldn't tell where he left off an' the lead begin. They left him there and rode off.

When Joe didn't show for supper for the first time in twenty years, we was all worried. Pa went out lookin' for him an' come back after midnight, his hands all dirty an' his face all wet with tears, saying as how he had just buried the bestest friend he had ever had. Ma an' Essie, they started to bawl, an' me an' Wilbur just looked at each other. Next day

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Pa rode all the way to Lincoln to find out what happened an' he found the men an' got the story. The sheriff wouldn't do nothing 'cause it was just a uppity nigger what got killed an' no white man was gonna hang for killing no bigmouth nigger.

"He put up with worse than that keepin' his mouth shut," Ma said when Pa come back with the story, her face all flickery with light from the box. "He didn't even cry when Becky up an' died. Why'd he be different this time? Why?"

I thought I knew, but I wasn't sayin'.

Pa watched *The News Tonite* the next day an' the next day an' the next, thinking that they'd mention, along with all the other killings, the killing of his best friend. But there wasn't no mention of it. "Maybe even the Lord thinks about niggers the way that damn sheriff does," Pa said to me.

It was just two days after that, while Ma was on duty, that a peddlar come to the door selling all kindsa stuff, like he or another one did about every two years or so. Ma took the dollar and a half that we had in the house an' bought some new pots an' some yarn an' threads an' needles an' a mirror an' a brand new dress for Essie.

That night after dinner Ma surprised Essie with the dress an' made her go an' put it on. Essie come out from behind the hung-up sheet all spiffy an' frilly in her new dress. Pa an' Wilbur complimented her a lot; Wilbur, especially, his eyes buggin' at the neck part which went a mite lower than her other dresses. An' then Ma said, "An' it only costed twenty-five cents."

Essie's mouth sort of twitched an' her eyes filled up with tears. An' she yelled out, "Twenty-five cents? Why do I have to wear twenty-five cent's worth of dress? Why cain't I have fur coats an' jools an' dresses costin' five hundred dollars from the Medici Collection of Beverly Hills? I don't want this cheap stuff! You can't make me live in this shack with no money an' never any gonna be comin' in! An' you can take this rag back!" An' with that she just stuck her fingers in the neck part an' ripped down the dress in half. While Ma and Pa both jumped up an' yelled an' carried on, it was a contest of what was sticking out farther into the air, Essie's bosoms or Wilbur's eyes.

Well, what happened was that Essie says, "I'm goin' out an' gettin' me some money on today's jackpot!" Then she runs out of the house and just off somewhere.

"What's the matter with your daughter?" yelled Pa at Ma.

"What's wrong?" Ma yells back at him. "If you'd provide us with what we need and want, she wouldn't have had to run off like that!"

"All of a sudden this ain't good enough for you?" Pa yelled back at her, an' on they went, an' on an' on an' on, so noisy and crazy carrying on that they didn't notice when Wilbur snuck out of the house. I seen him an' I tooked off after him, 'cause I didn't know what he was up to an' I thought I better see an' also I didn't want to stay in the house with Ma

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an' Pa fighting.

Essie went stumbling off into the woods, crying and mumbling to herself. Wilbur followed her, looking at footprints, broken branches, an' saying, "Clues! The bestest detective in the world will track down the perpitrater!" An eager boy with all his wits can surely catch up with a crying girl with no trouble, an' by an' by he did. I know, 'cause I followed him an' I seen the whole thing.

He caught up to her where she was just standing there an' cryin' an' kicking at rocks an' such, saying, "I want to be rich! I want to get the Super Jackpot!"

She jumped a little when Wilbur come out from behind a tree. "Found you!" he said. "Caught you!" he said.

"Oh, go away," she said to him.

He walked right to her an' put a hand on her shoulder an' I could see from where I was hid the look that was on his face. "Where's my reward?" he asked.

She shook his hand offa her. "Git away from me, you, you poor nothing!"

Well, then if the skin on the back of my neck didn't crawl like a million ants an' my hair get all prickly as I seen Wilbur knock his sister down on her back on the ground and just rip the resta her dress right off her. She screamed an' kicked an' punched at him, but he kept on saying things like "You can't defeat the Disco Cop!" An' then right as I watched he did to her what tain't never right for no man to do to no woman, for it's a shame an' a outrage an' a sin, an' it's a zillion times worser when it's done between blood kin like a brother an' sister.

Wilbur, when he done finished with his evil, he just lay there breathing heavy with a stupid look on his face. Essie's hand was movin' all over the ground like it was a rabbit lookin' for a thing to eat, when it wrapped itself around a big rock. Faster than I ever seen her move, as if the hand had a mind of its own, she crashed the rock down on Wilbur's head an' the blood an' brains was all over the place. She got up from under him an' if I didn't know that was Essie I'd never of recognized her as she kicked Wilbur's body in the face an' yelled at him, "I'm goin' to *Krazy Kwestions* an' get ten thousand dollars an' I ain't never gonna see none of you ever again!" An' then she ran off an' I never seen her no more.

Soon as my own head come back to itself, I ran home like the devil was chasin' me an' I got Pa an' I brought him to where Wilbur lay all dead an' swole up an' messy. Pa was real smart: he seen the rock an' the hole where Wilbur's head useta be an' the pieces of Essie's dress, an' Wilbur didn't even have a chance to die with his pants buttoned up, an' Pa, he knew what happened.

An' for the second time in a week, with his own hands he buried someone he loved.

We went home an' Ma was watchin' the "So-and-So Show," which was singing an' dancing but she really wasn't watchin', just starin' at it.

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Pa, who never lied to her in twenty years, he told her the truth of what happened. She didn't say nothin' for a while, but then she said, "It's cause we never had no avowals of love," an' wouldn't say no more. Pa was smart, but he ain't never had seen her "shows," an' so he didn't know what was goin' on inside her head an' when he come back from chores the next day an' found her hangin' right in the middle of the room, that poor man let out a cry fit to break the heart of a statue.

The box was showin' a "komershal" for Snow White Laundry Deetergint.

Pa cut her down and buried her near to the house. When he was done, I come back with him into the house. It was night, but we didn't need no lights for the box was brightinin' up the house with a long line of pretty girls all a-tap dancin' their hearts out.

"It's you," Pa said, real low, and he wasn't talkin' to me but to the box. "It's you," he says again. "You ain't no gift from the Lord. You's a curse from the Devil. You done cost me my whole family! You did! You! You took my family from me, you damned thing!"

He picked up the Bible, which was layin' near to his hand, an' threw it at the box. It didn't hit the winder, but a stickin-out part that had decorations near it that looked like this: ON-OFF

All of a sudden the view in the winder seemed to shrink into the middle an' we couldn't hear nothin' from it no more an' the winder was all black an' the box was dead.

Pa fell down into a chair an' put his head in his hands. "Shoulda done that weeks ago," he said. "If I'd a known. Ohh, if I'd a known!"

I walked over to him an' laid my head in his lap. He looked at me in the moonlight coming in from the door which we left open, an' he began strokin' me on the head real gentle.

"You're all I got left, Buster," he said. "All I got left is you."

I begun to wag my tail.

"That's a good dog, Buster," Pa said. "Good, good dog." ■

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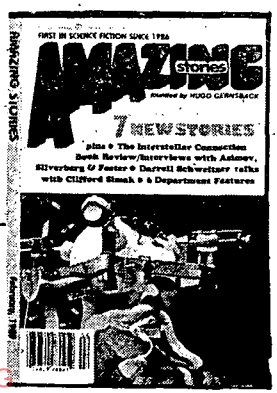

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Bio-Sketch

Israel O'Rourke

"Israel O'Rourke" is the nom de plume for collaborative works by two Brooklynites, Elliott Capon and G. M. O'Brien.

G. M. O'Brien is a writer-illustrator from Brooklyn's Park Slope section. At the age of eighteen, he became the youngest candidate ever to run for New York City Council. Now twenty-one, he is Production Manager for a major lithography shop in Greenwich Village. Pre-production recently commenced on his first screenplay: *Blackjack: The House Never Loses,* which he calls a "tale of terror". He is presently at work on his second screenplay, a space fantasy, which has been a pet project of his for several years. O'Brien is also founder of the Space colonization and exploration Political Action Committee of free Earth, known as SPACE, Inc. "Our aim," he says, "is to elect people to Congress who will plan for the future, because the future is here."

Elliott Capon, a promotion copywriter, is twenty-six years old and a newlywed. He has written a collection of interconnected hilarious sf stories, which are currently making the rounds of various humorless publishers. He is currently at work on a book entitled, "Opera for Kids and Other People Who Think They Don't Like Opera or I Hated Spinach Til I Tried It," a rather self-explanatory title. In his darker, more morbid moments, he writes stories of horror and dark fantasy, and is one of the founding members of the resurrected Esoteric Order of Dagon. This story marks his second sf/fantasy sale. Along with the publication of the story, he expects apologies and contrition from a vast horde of doubting friends and family members.

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Beating the System holds its own surprises

The lay of line-boat Lovers

(After Robert W. Service, with admiration)

by Frank C. Gunderloy, Jr.

Some say love is space's great wonder;
Mere parsecs no match for amour.
Its force can tear planets asunder,
Or pierce the bright sun to its core.

But with line-boats as punishment duty,
Love was turned to a devilish curse.
No more the soul's greatest beauty,
But a mind-rending torment or worse.

Yet one pair did beat the grim system;
Resurrected, no more cruelty's slaves.
Still I wonder—was it God in his wisdom
Or the Dark One who opened their graves?

So this is their song that I'll sing you,
Of lovers escaped from the void.
And maybe some tears I can bring you,
'Less your heart's made of pure asteroid.

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The Space Fleet knew, by '0-6-2, that it had to change
its ways;
Recruits were few, and desertions grew, despite
six-figure pays.
So it followed the lead of Ganymede, whose Navy could pick
and choose:
It offered love. Cold Stars above! That's awfully hard
to refuse.
First man and wife to the Navy life were earnestly
enlisted,
Then "just good friends"—to meet its ends, the Navy's rules
were twisted.
And finally—inevitably—the singles were
invited;
The word was: "Space! A swinging place!" The Navy was
delighted.
It may sound lewd, but ships were crewed with sex a
prime requirement,
And thousands came, with love the game, and stayed to
reach retirement.
At first, I guess, there was some mess, with crisis
and confusion;
When warp-drive's cold, pure sex grows old, and leads
to disillusion.
But the decades grew, then a century too, and custom
bred tradition,
So stage by stage, at earlier age, lovers sought
"ship-paired" condition.
Ship-paired teams met the Navy's dreams of crew-lists full
and waiting;
Mate cleaved to mate, love's highest state, crossed lines of rank
and rating.
Love made them strong, and warps years long, once sure to
draw desertion,
Were easily "manned"—pairs hand in hand—without the
least coercion.
As the pairing art became a part of Academy life and
living,
The Navy sought with subjects taught to foster the gift of
giving.
So cadets stood drill, and sweated still, through basic
math and science,
But committed heart had become a part of reaching
full compliance.
With "Compatibility" and "Sexual Stability" now in the
course of study,
Cadets bereft of emotional depth were dropped out
bowed and bloody.

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Five years they trained, their powers strained, with more and
more refinement,
Then—"Pairing Trial"—a final mile, before
ship-list assignment.
At last they stood, backs stiff as wood, in double rows
a-waiting,
While drum corps wheeled down triumphal field for
graduation mating.
Their pledges true, each couple knew, as Admirals honors
awarded,
That in future days, through battle's haze, their faith would
be rewarded.
A loved one's trust, through stellar dust, would win
against all trials,
And the worst patrols, to the dread black holes, could be drawn
with laughs and smiles.
Let the gravity drag, and the muscles sag, and the heart-beat
slow to a thump,
Ship-pairs would strain, and each other sustain, until they
passed warp-hump.
So great ships flared out, with never a doubt—
pairs *were* Grand Empire Navy,
But I tell you true (I guess maybe you knew)—
sometimes there's a toad in the gravy.

Now Alice Santee and Gunnar McKee were lovers from
childhood's forever;
They gained dual admission, survived the attrition, and came through the
"Trial" still together.
As ensign, that lass, he a drag-man first class, they listed as "Mixed pair;
all sections,"
And were shipped out by lot when the fighting got hot, in the year of the Tau
insurrections.
There—Cursed Luck—a new death weapon struck, the fluid field
disorganizer,
And from two hundred teams came identical screams; death is the true
equalizer.
But "Team 201"—Yes, Alice and Gunn—escaped the bursting
disruption,
On flare tube inspection, freak magnetic deflection prevented their bloody
eruption.
Alone, hand in hand, they fought to withstand the horror of ship-mates's
destruction;
Blood-bathed, but still stout, they turned ship about, and screamed to HQ for
instruction.
Remembering their vow, they managed somehow to get her in orbit 'round
Cetae,

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Then escape-podded down, at last safe and sound, ablative flames lighting the sky.
Their ground-trek travail, not germane to our tale, we'll pass over now and ignore;
It suffices to say that at last came a day when they reached squadron HQ once more.
But a heroes' reward was not in accord with the cloud they found themselves under;
Slapped into a cell, they began their pure hell, caught up in a gold-braided blunder.
While they'd struggled aground, the ship was brought down, and the crack Navy investigators
Decided, *sans* doubt, that none should have got out, and if two claimed they did, they were traitors.

So! Courts and boards! The admiralty lords called them up for treason;
The experts said they should be dead, escape beyond all reason.
Defense was weak, the magnetic freak could not be duplicated;
Their pleas and tears fell on deaf ears, they now were scorned and hated.
At last, disgraced, alone, debased, they heard their sentence spoken;
In death, they knew, they'd still be true, their love could not be broken.
But death was not to be their lot, no vacuum in the throat.
Better dead! The sentence read: "Condemned to crew a line-boat."

Line-boats flew, crewed just by two, in space-lanes never-ending;
Their orbits fixed, the two convicts' punishment love transcending.
Their duty clear, year after year, they scanned the ways for 'scape-pods,
As twisted decks of meteor wrecks yielded some who beat the odds.
On line-boat duty, they took no booty, but merely searched for souls
Who, gasping breath, had raced with death, and reached a pod's controls.
To the rescued ones, from a hundred suns, the time on a boat was short;
A month or two, then rendezvous with mother-ship; homeport.
But to line-boat pair, in deep dispair, eternal seems the mission;

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Beg or plead, no ear will heed, or offer
them remission.
Ten years, no less, under full duress, is minimum
line-boat sentence;
Long days alone, trying to atone, ignored
despite repentance.
For heinous crime, a decade's time might not seem
long to weather,
But much, much worse, the ship-pair's curse, is
to be alone—together!
In effect, divorced; conditioning enforced
by skilled psychotechnicians;
So one watch kept while the other slept
under hypno-inhibitions.
Each slept ensealed 'neath ceramic shield that denied
love's culmination;
To see so much, but never to touch: the
torment of damnation.
Each glass-steel case revealed the face
of lover in repose,
And conditioning's force controlled their course: one slept
as the other arose.
Twelve hours' grind, then fettered mind brought
solitary dreaming,
And as one slipped to ceramic crypt, the other
wakened screaming.
Struggling awake, trying to break the mind's
implanted chain;
Fighting the draw of prison-bed's maw as sleep crushed
down the brain.
Sleep a minute less, and you'd caress
your heart's one true desire
Wake a minute more, avoid shield's door,
and warm to pair-mate's fire.
Futile dreams! Line-boat teams were
separated ever,
Their hearts in shreds, with heavy heads, they touched
each other—never.
Their only link, as you might think, was through
the souls they saved;
Someone who'd tell "She sure looks swell"
to the other suffering slave.
Someone to relay words each had to say, and how they'd sighed
as they said it;
"He loves you still" would bring a chill, and leave the
mate light-headed.
So frantically driven, unforgiven, they scanned the ports
and view-screens,
Searching the night; pod's beacons bright that would
bring them go-betweens.
I'd like to find that twisted mind who Hell's
line-boats invented;
With rescuers sent as punishment, driven
until demented.

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I'd find a way to make him pay for a billion parsec's
pain,
But chances are, on some distant star, he'd do it over
again.

Now Liss and Gunn, first trial done, were taken
by technicians,
Whose drugs and probes and flashing strobes adjusted
minds' conditions.
Their science grim, no foolish whim, built new
synaptic junctions;
Subdural shocks and mental blocks reshaped all
mental functions.
And now the fates to these pair-mates dealt horror
out with sadness,
For competitions between technicians had reached the
point of madness.
Their techno-team, to gain esteem, expanded
its assignment;
Eagerly bent on experiment, it added
cruel refinement.
So Gunn awoke, his spirit broke, his mind
a driven torment
Of compulsive need: he would be freed, if he
got Alice pregnant!
And she in turn knew she could earn her freedom
as a mother;
But locked apart, how could they start? They couldn't
touch each other.
So out they went, their line-boat sent to take
its orbit station,
Circling a sun, their time begun, love's
cruelest separation.
Their post was far from central star, where meteors
seldom wander,
Where souls in need were few indeed, as time dragged
all the longer.
Thus all the worse. No pods—a curse! No-one to
offer solace,
And a thousand tries no ways devise for Gunn to
reach his Alice.
A laser-bore from detector's core he built to
free his lover,
But impervious to light's hot thrust was
cold ceramic cover.
The burning questions, mental suggestions: "Can you reach her?
Sire your son?"
Drove him ever on, his judgement gone, in a
battle never done.
And Alice too, when her watch came due, clawed at his
glass-steel tomb,
But streaks of red as her fingers bled could not make
quick her womb.

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He woke, she slept; he cursed, she wept;
their lives an abomination,
Through days untold, conditioning's hold
denied love's culmination.
But the fates grind on, and move a pawn, and the game draws
near to ending,
For rules don't break, even for love's sake, but they sure
endure some bending.

There are other times, and other climes, and life-forms
more than a few;
Some swing in trees, some swim the seas, and some blast
off for the blue.
From Whex comes a race that you'll find in space not normally
plied by man;
Whexans die and drift through the subspace rift, then return
to life again.
No ships they need, this alien seed, in
living capsules sealed;
Like slumbering gods, in chitinous pods, they sail
the subspace field.
Pods seem the same, whether steel of frame, or
exuded protein shell;
On a line-boat's screen, no difference's seen, and "Alert!"
shouts the warning bell.
Then it's drag-rigs out, and come about, and the tractors'
push and shove;
Gunnar's spirits soared as he hauled aboard what he hoped was a link
with his love.
But his heart grows cold, as the shells unfold, like an oyster
straining sand;
Not a man's machine, but an unknown being; dead, yet
alive and grand.
Then with rasping breath, it returns from death, and probes
for cerebration,
For this thing from Whex its life protects by the
ultimate adaptation.
The Whexans adjust, whenever they must, their forms to
another's dream;
With chameleon's skill, they hopes fulfill with empathy
in the extreme.
Now this spawn of Whex was an omni-sex, and could pleasure
any and all,
And to Gunnar's surprise, what he saw arise was a woman
full and tall.
Now conditioning drecrees—and it never frees—that rescues and
sex don't mix;
If man saves girl, she's a precious pearl, not made for
his lurid tricks.
And if girl saves man, she must withstand any move
or advance unwanted,
And yet provide that his great male pride come through
it all undaunted.

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But by some quirk, this failed to work when faced
with the alien form;
The eye deceived, and Woman perceived, but outside of
conditioning's norm.
(S)he sensed Gunn's fire, and read his desire, and shaped
an orifice sweet;
Alice gone from his mind, an animal blind, he succumbed
to the throbbing beat.
Relief long sought, he gave no thought to whom or what
he was holding;
With back arched high, and spasmodic cry, to the alien
flesh enfolding.
Alice in her turn, felt her body burn, when she woke to
the Whexan gaze;
Gunn's image replaced by this *man* she faced, and all
his wondrous ways.
(s)He knows her needs and her craving reads as her tormented
mind he probes,
So with gentle fingers and a touch that lingers, he parts her
glistening robes.
Then with wild exuberance, the grand protruberance she meets
with pelvic thrust,
As Whexan, everted, its organ converted to fulfill
her clutching lust.
So hard and soft, twelve on, twelve off, the stranger
smiled and pleasured.
While Liss and Gunn, their senses numb, forgot whom
they truly treasured.
Thus in steady embrace, they fall through space, and it's best
if we ignore them,
'Til at last a blip—it's the mother ship—shines on
the screen before them.
The tractor's true, and the docking crew drags line-boat
in for service,
And what they find just flares the mind (and makes
those experts nervous).
The Whexan's flown, a new pod grown, and it died without cares
as it parted,
While a routine check on the medical deck shows a brand new
life has started.
The tests, soon done, prove it's Gunnar's son that Alice
will proudly bear,
So just as agreed, the pair were freed, while the "experts"
tore their hair.
The Navy, shocked, its foundation rocked (Someone beat the line-boat
system!)
Made it all hush-hush, sent them off with a rush; they were gone before we
missed 'em.
Then the tractors ripped, and the boat was stripped down to every bolt and
rivet,
But the secret sought, despite what they thought, wasn't there for the boat to
give it.

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Well, it's plain to me, and I'm sure you see how love
reached consummation;
As Whexan rearranged, and lovers exchanged, it
achieved insemination.
Gunnar's seed, kept fresh in warm Whex flesh, by
feminine form protected;
Then—inside out, male organ stout—appropriately
re-injected.
So simply, logically, stated biologically, as I'm sure
you've realized,
Like a flowering tree, by a Whexan bee, they'd been
cross-fertilized!

On the stellar equator, some ten cycles later, out on the
remotest rim,
I saw them again, and as a one-time friend, they told me
this story grim.
Sure—a Navy career—but stuck out here, it essentially
all was finished;
What they really got, in this star-fringe slot, was punishment
barely diminished.
Assigned ashore, to warp no more, they crewed a
flare-pot station;
Locked in grade, the Navy made them
live in segregation.
This price still small, if it were all they'd paid for
freedom's wings,
But the true hard cost; their love was lost. Gone! That most
precious of things.
To my surprise, in Alice's eyes, whenever Whexan
was named,
Desire was burning, a blatant yearning, open and
unashamed.
And her mate, as a rule, she called "poor weak fool," for falling
to Whexan charms;
Damning poor Gunn, while she had done no different
in Whexan arms.
Then I turned about, expecting a shout, as he vented
rage and hurt,
But with just a twitch, he said "faithless bitch" and gave her a
look like dirt.
Then he focussed afar, like he saw a star, and his lips framed
a whispered word;
I drew back sad; I thought him mad, for "Oh, the boat . . ."
was what I heard.
Then I understood: he meant, if he could, he'd return to
the line-boat pen,
If just once more, with that Whexan whore, he could live
and lust again.
Their secret unlocked left me so shocked that I somehow
felt defiled;

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Then I almost died, as deep inside, I suddenly thought
of the child.
What had he become, in the tedium of this barracks of
tears and pain?
In a world gone wrong, with hate so strong, could he hope to
grow up sane?
They exchanged a glance that I caught by chance when I asked
to see the boy;
Their faces glowed, and it clearly showed, the child was
their love and joy.
They spoke so well, it was easy to tell the lad
was not rejected;
For each other no longer, but grown all the stronger, to him was
their love directed.
Then I followed along, in a life-field strong, to the surface
bleak and cold
Of that darkened rock, where I got such a shock that my very
heart grew old.
For there on a flow of calcite snow in the burn of
the vacuum cruel
Was—Oh, my God!—A Whex-like pod with a shell of
transparent jewel.
And through it showed, as the field-lights glowed, a miniature
lifeless form
Like a boy of ten, and as I looked again, I saw it grow
live and warm.
Then it changed with a flicker, and my breath came quicker, and my wonder
has never ceased;
Its body a girl's, with golden curls, and a smile that
could charm a beast.
And someday soon, on this airless moon, its love
will again flow free;
It will feel the urge, and then emerge to Liss
—and Gunn—and me!

Some say love is space's great wonder;
Mere parsecs no match for amour.
Its force can tear planets asunder,
Or pierce the bright sun to its core.

But sex has more ramifications
Than most people ever have seen.
Two's, twenties, and all combinations
It can be betwixt and between.

Now hominids generally couple,
Procreation requiring but two,
While others, a great deal more supple,
Need dozens to do what they do.

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The result may be simply amazing,
Like on Whex, where the rule is by threes,
And from certain three-way interphasing
Are born flowers resembling the bees!

Bio-Sketch

Frank C. Gunderloy, Jr.

Born March 9, 1931. Grew up and educated on the East coast: B.S. degree, Washington College, Chestertown, Maryland, 1952; Ph.D. degree (Chemistry), Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1957. Met and married wife, Pauline in New Jersey, 1955; two sons, one daughter. Worked for major oil company for five years, then discovered to be a native Californian who was accidentally born on the wrong side of the country. Moved to California in 1962 to join North American Aviation's (now Rockwell International's) Rocketdyne division during the hey-day of missiles and space engines. Survived the decline and fall of the aerospace industry, managing R & D and pilot production groups working on rocket propellants and other energetic chemicals at Rocketdyne until 1978. Transferred to Rockwell's Environmental Monitoring and Services Center in 1978, currently working on contingency planning for oil and hazardous materials spill response, as well as various other aspects of the control of chemicals in the environment. Live in Simi Valley, a "bedroom community" in Ventura County, north of Los Angeles, with wife, one son, and daughter. Interests include motor-home camping, American Indian artifacts and rock-hounding. Studying English and Creative Writing at nights at nearby Moorpark College. Have authored/co-authored eight scientific papers, published in various learned journals, along with 18 U.S. patents. "Lay of the Line-Boat Lovers" first published fiction.

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by Ed Uchno

BLOOD MONEY

THE PACKAGE appeared to be totally ordinary. George Adams hardly glanced at it as he tucked the rest of the day's mail under his arm and bent down to pick it up.

The first thing he noticed was its weight. He'd thought at first it was just the latest literary club selection, but it was much too light to be a book. In fact, it seemed that the package was empty. George shrugged, unlocked the front door and went inside.

His wife Beth would be home soon; she got off work when George did, but traffic was usually worse on that side of town. He put down the mail and hefted the package thoughtfully. His name and address were clearly typed on the brown cardboard, but there was no return address and the postmark was too blurred and too faint to read. He shrugged again and tossed the package onto the coffee table, then went into the bedroom to change into some comfortable clothes.

HE WAS lounging on the living room couch looking through the mail when Beth arrived. He looked up apprehensively as the door burst open. She walked in quickly, not looking in his direction, and threw her coat and purse onto the dining room table.

She shook her head back. "Damn, what a day," she said to him, to herself, to anyone who would listen. She turned toward him. "Any mail?"

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"The usual bills and junk," he mumbled. "And this." He pointed to the package with his foot.

"What's that?"

"Don't know. Haven't opened it yet."

"Aren't you curious?" She started toward the coffee table.

George rolled to the side and made a grab for the package. "Sure, I just save the good stuff for the end."

He sat up and put the box on his lap. Beth stood on the opposite side of the table and folded her arms. "Who's it from?" she asked.

"Can't tell. No address and no postmark. Feels empty." He looked up at her. She was staring at the package.

"Hi," he said, smiling.

Her eyes seemed to unfocus and then she looked at him.

"Hi, honey," she said sweetly, as if she'd just gotten home. She tiptoed around the coffee table and bent down and kissed him lightly. She sighed as if relieved of some weight and sat down heavily next to him.

"Well, open it," she urged.

He fished out a pocketknife and sliced open the strapping tape. When he spread the box flaps, there was a small metal block surrounded by styrofoam chips. He pulled the block out carefully to avoid spilling the chips, and knocked off a few fragments that clung to it.

The block was rectangular and fit easily in his palm. It was very light, a hollow box rather than a block, and looked like burnished aluminum. There was a small red button in the middle of one side, and that was all. He turned it over in his hand. There were no seams. It looked as if it were molded from a single piece of metal. Not one line or crack or even a scratch marred its surface. George admired the skill of the craftsman even as he pondered his identity.

"What is it?" asked Beth, leaning sideways for a better look.

"Got me." George leaned forward to look in the package. He dug through the chips and found a small piece of stiff paper, like an index card. The message on the card was typed, just like the address on the package. George read it and said nothing. Beth grasped his hand and turned it to read the card.

"PRESS THE BUTTON," the card read. "SOMEONE YOU DO NOT KNOW WILL DIE. YOU WILL RECEIVE $50,000."

George turned the card over, looking for some identifying mark. He put the card down and dug through the package again, spilling the packing material over the table on on the floor. There was nothing else, just the note — and the box.

"What the hell?" He looked from the box to the card and back again, lost in thought.

"Is this some kind of joke?" Beth asked, her voice quivering slightly.

"We don't know many people who would joke, and none like this."

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"Well then, what? Maybe it's a mistake."

"It was addressed to me, at this address." He was still only half-aware of his surroundings, his mind racing to find some logical explanation. "This can't be for real."

"Can't be," Beth echoed. "Can it?"

"WELL," BETH began, munching her salad, "what do you make of it?"

George looked up from his soup, observing how good she looked in the dim restaurant light. The years had treated them both well. Twenty-three years together now. His thoughts drifted back to the box. The shock and confusion he'd first felt was mellowing into a floating detachment. Feelings came and went in an instant. He wanted to tell her how good she looked, how he loved her. It didn't come easy. So many words and thoughts, racing, criss-crossing. It was the feeling after seeing a good movie, or after a quarrel, when everything he'd ever wanted to say seemed at the tip of his tongue, and yet so distant.

"I don't know," he finally said. "I want to just chuck it and forget it."

"Going out to eat didn't help, did it?"

He shook his head.

She edged forward on her chair, a pixie look on her face. "What if it's for real?"

It took a while for the question to register. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, what if the box really works?" She rested her chin on her hand, toying with her salad with her fork. "If it does what it says."

"Oh, come on."

"I'm serious."

"For God's sake, Beth!" He put down his spoon and sat back and stared at her. The pixie look was gone, replaced by cold calculation. "You *are* serious!"

"Look, we don't know where or who it came from, and you yourself said it looks too well-made to be a silly prank."

"So?"

"So what if it really does what it says."

George was finding it hard keeping his mind focused. "How could it? Why?"

"Does it matter how or why?"

Her persistence pierced his heart like an icicle. His diffuse thoughts evaporated and he found himself solidly, horribly in the present.

"You'd actually do it! You'd press that button and have someone die just for the money. I can't believe it."

"It said someone we don't know. For all we know it could be somebody in Africa or Asia. That's where most of the people are. Maybe some starving kid who'd rather be dead, who'd be dead anyway in another week."

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"It's crazy. It can't work. It's not worth arguing about."

"Maybe it doesn't work, and maybe it does. But if it does — Think of it! Think of all the things we've always wanted and couldn't have — couldn't do."

"Damn it, I *am* thinking! Suppose we pressed it once, for a joke, not even expecting — and suppose it worked and we'd killed someone for a lousy $50,000. Are we that hard up? Could we enjoy the money knowing we murdered to get it?

"It's not murder. Murder's when you do it face to face, out of hate, or jealousy, or revenge."

"Or greed? What makes it different from killing someone during armed robbery?"

"It's not their money we're taking, and we couldn't be held responsible for the death. There'd be no connection at all."

George pulled the napkin off his lap and threw it on the table. "I don't feel like eating," he said getting up, and tossed down some money for the meal. "I'll be waiting in the car for you. I hope you enjoy our meal."

THEY DIDN'T say a word to each other all the way home. There was nothing to say. It was like all their arguments. After twenty-three years, everything gets to be the same. They'd just actively ignore each other until the tension relieved itself. More discussion would just lead to more fighting.

Things somehow got louder during these silences. Doors slammed louder, feet on stairs walked louder, coats landed on tables louder. Even the silence was loud, an avalanche of quiet, a wall of nothing.

Beth strode into the living room, where they'd left the box. The room was dark except for a small light they'd left on while they were out. She picked up the box triumphantly. Shadows danced on the walls and ceiling. George stood across the room, frozen.

"Please, Beth."

"It won't be on your conscience, just mine. And if you don't want the money, I can use it myself."

She pressed the button dramatically. The scene held for an awful second, then another, and another.

"Damn it!" she screamed, throwing the box at George. "Nothing happened. You're right, it's all a gag. At my expense. I hope you're happy!"

"I'm not happy," he whispered, picking up the box, squeezing it tightly. "Not happy at all."

"You got what you wanted."

"I didn't want this. All this," he spread his arms, "for some pathetic practical joke. If I find out who did this . . ."

"Wait a minute," Beth said, suddenly animated. "The package wasn't addressed to *us*. It was addressed just to *you*. Maybe it just didn't work

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for me."

George shook his head. "I don't want to hear any more."

"Please," she said, coming toward him. "Try it, just once."

George raised his arm, not knowing whether he was going to throw the box or hit his wife. Then all the fight went out of him.

"All right. If it means that much to you, I'll press the God damned button. At least you'll know I tried."

The button moved slowly, as if some great force were behind it. He felt a slight click as the button reached bottom.

THE ROOM suddenly flooded with light. George covered his eyes with his arm, dropping the box. He heard Beth gasp just in front of him. The light vanished as quickly as it appeared.

Beth was lying on the floor. He didn't have to feel her pulse to know she was dead; her body lay crumpled in an impossible position. Next to her was a large, neat stack of money. He didn't have to count it to know there was $50,000.

He knelt in front of Beth and picked up the box. The note had said someone he didn't know would die.

Then he saw the irony, but he was too wracked with sobs to care. ■

Bio-Sketch

Edward Uchno

I'm 28 years old, a native of Hazleton, PA. I attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology from 1968 to 1973, graduating with Bachelor of Science Degrees in Aeronautics & Astronautics, and in Life Sciences. I've worked at the MIT Wright Bros. Wind Tunnel, Boeing Aerospace Co. in Seattle, and at MTE Hydraulics in Rockford, IL. I've worked on man-powered aircraft, wind tunnel architectural studies, Space Shuttle Orbiter carrier aircraft, and solar power satellites. Currently I'm working with hydraulic pumps and motors for farm machinery, road equipment, and various applications.

My interests include carpentry, alternate energy sources, science (especially astronomy, astronautics, anthropology and biology), science fiction and old (circa 1938) movies (esp. Katharine Hepburn).

My wife and I are both devoted Anglophiles, Monty Python fans, and students of ECKANKAR. We live with five cats and a great number of books and stereo albums.

I've admired writers since grade school, and I've been a ravenous reader all my life. I started writing in high school, and attended the first Clarion Science Fiction Writers Workshop. My desire to write was submerged by the student activities of the early 1970s, and by my fledgling engineering career in the mid-1970s. My urge resurfaced this year (1979), with many of my old ideas coming back with more feeling and depth. Some of my favorite authors are Ray Bradbury, James Gunn, Larry Niven, Robert Silverberg and Colin Wilson.

"Blood Money" is the second story I've written since taking up the typewriter again, and will be my first published story.

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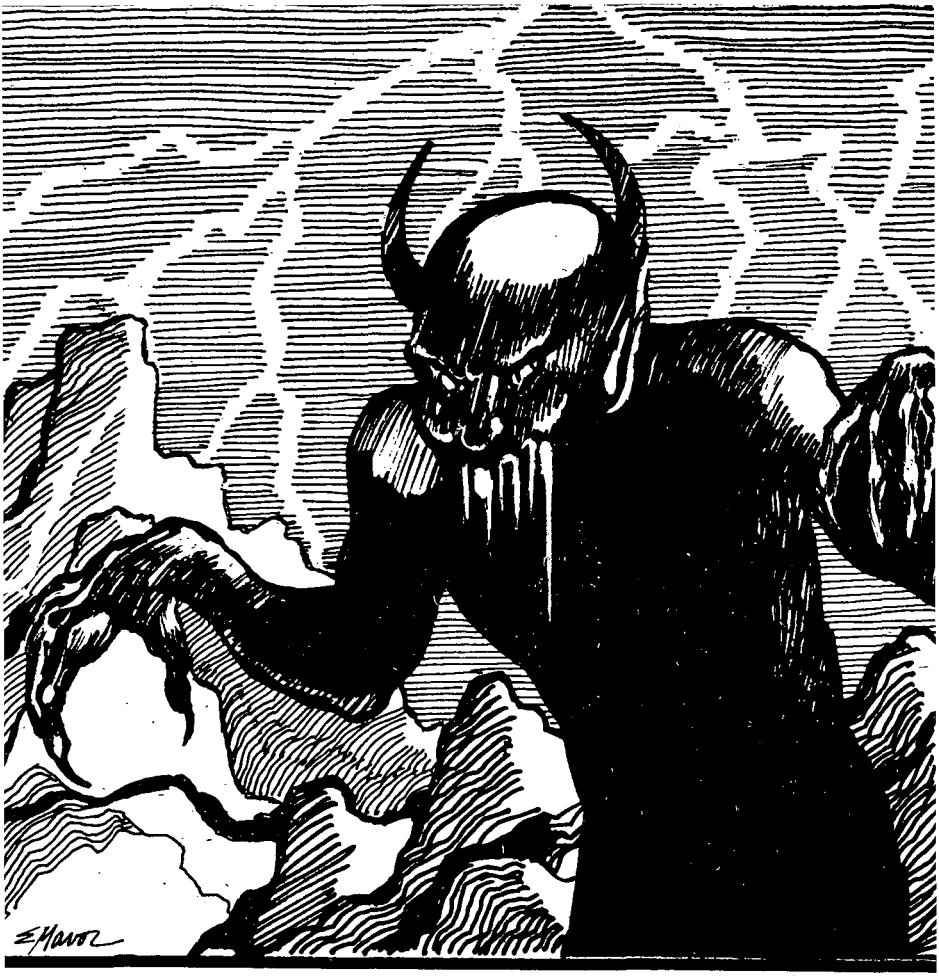

DAMNED FUNNY

by Marvin Kaye

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HELL WAS very much on Drake's mind—and the way he imagined it was like a Medieval woodcut. This image was partly dictated by his rigorous religious upbringing but mostly by the paucity of his creative faculties. His mind was so preoccupied with visions of willowy women in intimate states of disarray that he had little energy left over to summon up inventive pictures of the Pit.

So when he thought about Hell, he envisioned a fundamentalist nightmare peopled with lean, sinewy demons, fiends who raked long, encrusted claws along the tortured, pustulant loins of the damned.

Yet in spite of this sharply-etched cerebral phantasma, Drake could not put aside the notion of betting with the Devil. His compulsive daydreams—in which he wallowed in forests of distaff flesh—had gained the upper hand, especially since their fulfillment fled further from his grasp with the waning years. So, at length, he determined to test his wits against the foul fiend and his infernal minions, bargaining for those carnal pleasures which had long been denied him by the God he feared was nothing more than myth.

He studied the problem for a long time, researching the traps and pitfalls which had damned other hapless contestants in battles with the dark powers. At length, Drake evolved a strategy that promised to be virtually failsafe, and one midnight, set about to test it. With considerable trepidation, he etched a pentagram upon the bare floor of his chilly walkup studio apartment. As he chanted the fateful words, he trembled at the prospect of the hideous entity who soon would materialize in the middle of the five-sided figure.

So when a short, pot-bellied devil in a red-flannel union suit plopped in a heap in the center of the pentagram, Drake was understandably nonplussed.

Whistling, the diabolic visitor sat for a moment trying to catch his breath. "Damn," he complained, "that was one powerful telegram you sent!" He adjusted a stubby spade-tip tail through the emergency flap of his underwear, then, mustering up what dignity he could, addressed his host in a gravelly voice. "Yeah, boy, what the hell do you want?"

Drake couldn't find his voice.

"Come on, come on," the fiend rasped, extracting a black stogey and lighting it with a snap of his talons, "I ain't got the whole damned night!"

"Are . . . are you," Drake stammered, "the . . . uh, honest-to-God devil?"

The other scowled. "Look, watch your language, will you? And, anyway, I'm not the Big Boss, who the hell do you think you are?"

"But you are—a demon?"

"What's the matter, you blind? Don't I look like the devil?"

Studying the tubby creature trapped within the chalk walls of the pentagram, Drake smirkingly conceded the point. The dumpy fiend re-

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minded him of Lou Costello. Lumpy, short and rotund, the imp—who said his name was Tiny Tom—had two plastic horns pasted to his head, a threadbare cape too short to hide the scraggly protuberance that was an excuse of a tail, and a rubber pitchfork clutched in a smudgy, unmanicured paw.

Tiny Tom belched. "Okay, kiddo, what's the deal? You wanna sell your you-know-what for my what-do-you-want?"

Drake shook his head. "None of that kind of contract. I want to pose three tasks. If you can't do any one of them, I do not forfeit my soul."

"A threesie, a threesie!" the demon whooped, "I ain't had one of them for years!" With that, the devil ignored his host's protests and launched into an enumeration of three-task contract rules in the tireless manner of a daytime TV game show emcee.

When the tirade was over, Drake removed the crushed remnant of a cigarette pack from his pocket and fished out the charred stub of a butt.

"I have one modification in mind," he told Tiny Tom. "I want a wish for any task you can't accomplish."

"A snap," said the other. "That's Contract 34 B. What do you want me to give you?"

"Riches, irresistibility to women, and immortality," the mortal replied, puffing nervously on the weed.

Tiny Tom looked crestfallen. "Boy, are those typical!" he moaned. "I thought I had a live wire for a minute. Okay," he continued over Drake's protests, "the loot and the broads is okay, but the immortality is out."

It was Drake's turn to look crestfallen. "Why? I thought you could do just about anything."

"Not immortality, buster."

"Why not?"

"Not our department." He held up a paw in a gesture of reassurance. "Tell you what, though, I *might* be able to give you an extended life."

"How extended?"

"Hold on a minute, I have to check it out." Reaching inside the moth-eaten cape, Tiny Tom extracted a sheaf of papers, referred to them, then began to work out a complicated series of calculations. He looked like a seedy insurance agent working on his actuarial tables. After a few minutes, the fiend looked up from his jottings.

"As of this minute, boy," he said, "your probability span runs up to five hundred years."

"Probability span?" Drake asked. "What's that?"

"It's sorta complicated. You have to compute capacities for good and evil, divide them into the inertia factor of probable harmlessness, and come up with the optimum time you can be *tolerated* on earth." Tom shrugged, and put the papers away. "So, anyway, your probability

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span is five centuries. That okay?"

"I guess it'll have to do," Drake sighed. "Shall we get on with it?"

The devil nodded.

"All right," the mortal warned, "now I don't want any misunderstandings. I'll give you three tasks to perform, one for each wish. You can't back out of the sequence once it's begun. If you can't perform *any single task* out of the three, I forfeit nothing. You must perform *all three* in order to take my soul, understand?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm not a dummy," said Tom. "I've been in this business a long time. When I *can't* do something, you get that particular wish."

"Now—do I sign anything?"

"Nope," the demon demurred. "Not till it looks like I've got a chance to collect." Drake looked suspicious, but the fiend waved a deprecating paw. "Look, it's not a trick, it just makes for less bookkeeping!"

"All right," the other said. "Now one more thing—no tricks about my wishes, see? No 'witches money' that vanishes by dawn. If I win unlimited wealth, I want it in contemporary legal American currency—"

"Don't worry already!" Tiny Tom said, exasperated. "Such shyster tricks I wouldn't pull! *Enough* with the technicalities—what's the first task?"

"You are to appear inside a certain building which I will describe." Drake took a piece of paper out of his pocket and referred to it. Tiny Tom, scowling, held up an admonitory talon.

"Now look here, you don't gimme no churches! That's absolutely forbid in Contract 34B!"

"It's not a church," Drake replied, annoyed. "Give me *some* credit. You are to appear inside this building at two a.m. on Christmas Eve. You will walk to the front door, open it and step outside."

"That's all?!" Tiny Tom inquired, amazed.

"Uh-huh. The building is on the Virginia side of the Potomac River on a site once called—(appropriately enough)—Hell's Bottom. The precise situation is seventy-seven degrees, two minutes west by——"

IT WAS December 25.

At 2:05 a.m., Drake stood ankle-deep in snow, shivering and cursing. Tiny Tom, standing by his side, looked insufferably smug.

"Like to see me do it again?" he asked.

"No!" the other snapped, his teeth chattering. "But how did you manage? The barrier was unbroken! I'd swear it!"

"Only it wasn't a barrier," the pudgy imp conceded. "Not that you didn't have a clever idea, getting me to materialize inside what you figured would be The Pentagon after working hours in mid-winter on a holiday."

"I figured," said Drake, "that the night staff would be minimal and it

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would be cold enough so all the doors and windows would be shut, making the building into a perfect pentagram, which you can't cross."

"Only I did!" the demon taunted.

"How?! Did somebody leave a window or a door open?"

"Nope."

"Well, are you going to tell me, or do I have to guess?" the mortal asked somewhat testily.

"I'm surprised at you," Tom grinned, spitting between two blades of grass. A tiny column of steam rose hissing from the snow. "You were too hung up on technicalities," he continued, scratching his back with the rubber prongs of his pitchfork. "You gave me exact latitude and longitude, but didn't restrict my movements in other dimensions."

Drake stared at him with a blank expression.

"Look," Tom said impatiently, "I had to use time travel just to get to Christmas Eve . . ." He shuddered as he said the words.

"Time travel? What good would *that* do you? I said 2 a.m.—"

"Of what year?"

"What difference would that make?"

"Because you only told me the proper parallels and meridians, but you never said the building had to be The Pentagon. So I materialized one hundred and ninety-five years into the future."

Drake whirled. "You mean this is—?"

"2,167 A.D., you should pardon the expression."

"And *that?"* he asked, pointing a frostbitten finger at the large building. "It *looks* like The Pentagon. They didn't tear it down."

"Nope," said the devil, "just the opposite—they added on to it. You are looking at The Hexagon!"

Striking his forehead with a chilly palm, Drake laughed heartily, in spite of himself.

"I'LL BE with you in a minute, Tom, "he said. "I want a drink."

They were back in the dingy living-room. Drake pulled on a sweater, still icy from the nocturnal visit to Washington, then poured three fingers of Bushmills and drank it down neat.

Tom settled back in the armchair his host had placed, upon request, within the pentagram and urged Drake to take his time. He cleaned his long nails with the tip of his tail, which had somehow stretched to many times its original length. He leered at the mortal.

"Irresistibility, huh?" Tom chuckled. "Good choice. So you don't get lots of money, so what? You get just what a man *really* needs, right?" Winking obscenely, he pulled a rolled parchment from the folds of his cape.

"What's that?" asked Drake.

"Our contract," said Tiny Tom, scratching his ear. "This time we

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have to get it on paper." He tossed the scroll across the room. Drake caught it, read it carefully, weighing each word and syllable. At last, he nodded and as soon as he did, a twinge shot through his arm and the contract flew back through the air to the devil—who held it open long enough to verify Drake's scarlet signature on the dotted line.

"It's automatic," Tom explained proudly. "New model."

"All right," the other replied, rubbing his arm, "now the second task depends on the truth of your answer to my very first question earlier this evening—whether you are, in fact, a fully accredited demon, authorized to act on behalf of your Boss."

"Yeah, yeah, I *said* I am. Go ahead."

"But understand, Tom—my task, by logical extension, must be binding on any and all existing demons dwelling within the boundaries of the space-time continuum in which I—"

"Damn it!" Tom swore impatiently. "Are you a lawyer?"

"The action you are to perform must be irrevocable and eternal."

"Technicalities! *All right,* but what am I supposed to *do* already?!"

"Destroy Hell," Drake replied.

TEN MINUTES later, Tiny Tim's jaw was still flapping, though no coherent sound had yet emerged. Smiling superciliously, Drake helped himself to another slug of Irish.

"Well, Tom," he asked at last, "what's the matter? You stuck?"

The demon shook his head, blew out his cheeks and puffed in disgust. "No, boy, I'm not stuck. But you listen to me and ditch this dumb idea!"

"Why should I?" Drake retorted cockily. "It's obvious I've stumped you.!"

"Like Hell you have! I can do what you're asking, if that's what you *really* want . . ."

The mortal stopped grinning. "Only what? Is there a catch somewhere?"

"You bet there is! You asked me to 'Destroy Hell,' a physical locality, but you didn't say nothing about devils."

"Which means?" Drake asked, suddenly worried.

"Which means you're going to kick a whole bunch of fiends out of their homes—including the Boss. They'll be plenty sore, and they'll be waiting for you, just you, every single one of them."

"Waiting for what?" Drake turned pale.

"To get even."

The mortal paced nervously, trapped in a predicament of his own making. If he insisted on the task, he would find himself the object of concerted diabolic wrath. On the other hand, if he withdrew it, it would make him one task short in the sequence of three. It had taken him

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months to come up with his original trio of demonic stultifiers, none of which seemed to stop Tiny Tom at all.

"Hold on a minute!" he exclaimed suddenly. "If I withdraw this task, Tom, *and* if you give me nothing in return, then our original bargain is automatically invalidated."

"It is not! You gotta give me a new second task!"

"Uh-uh," Drake objected, "the terms specify three wishes and three tasks. But you're letting me take back the second one, an option which I am taking. So now I could either go on to task number three or else bow out entirely, but there's nothing that says I have to come up with a fourth stunt for you."

"You signed the contract!"

"I received no material commodity, so I doubt that you can make it stick. Coming up with a fourth task would violate the symmetry of the three-wish formula. Now, if I can just find that prayer book around here someplace—"

Tiny Tom hopped up and down in mingled fear and anger. "Wait a minute, wait a minute!" he howled frantically, dropping his pitchfork on the armchair and stepping to the very edge of the pentogram. "Tell you what—show you what a nice guy I am! I'll make you a special offer. Go on with the third task and I'll forget about the second one."

Drake looked dubious.

"That's not all, either!" he wheedled. "If you stump me and win the extended life-span, I'll even throw in the unlimited wealth bit for nothing. That way the irresistibility will practically be assured!"

Drake turned his back on Tom to hide the triumphant smile on his lips. The sight of the ridiculous little demon prancing up and down on both hooves was genuine low comedy. The fact that his decision meant so much to Tom richly satisfied the normally ineffectual mortal.

"I don't know," Drake drawled, "maybe . . . *maybe* if I had the money right now—"

"You've got it!" Tiny Tom yelped. Gleefully, Drake agreed to the new arrangement, and the devil, uttering a sigh of relief, plopped back down into the armchair.

Unfortunately, the pitchfork was still on the seat.

Drake rolled on the floor with uncontrolled laughter. Tiny Tom, who leapt about four feet into the air, rubbed his ample bottom and glowered at his ungracious host.

"Haw-haw!" he grumbled. "How'd you like it if it was sticking in *you???*"

"Sorry, Tom," the mortal gasped, "but it *was* funny! Lucky your pitchfork is only rubber!"

"*I'll* say," the demon mumbled sullenly. Then, yawning without covering his mouth, he declared that the night's exertions had worn him out. "Call me again tomorrow night. Make it at midnight, and we'll wrap

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up the final task."

Before his host could raise any objections, Tiny Tom dematerialized with a near-terminal burp.

DRAKE IMMEDIATELY consulted the bank book which his ex-girlfriend, Ethel Gassner, had so recently depleted. The balance staggered him; it was in seven figures. He replaced it in the upper left-hand corner of his battered desk and as he did, he noticed an unfamiliar sheaf of papers and folders. Examining them, he found his name was on all of them; they were composed of various title deeds to valuable real estate and a generous sprinkling of bluechip securities.

He was impressed by the promptness and dependability of the pudgy imp. Yet his enthusiasm was somewhat tempered by the fact that the following day was Sunday, making it impossible to do anything meanful with his new-found wealth.

Drake slept for several hours. He woke from a night of unpleasant dreams. His sudden affluence was more than offset by a growing uneasiness. As he reconsidered the idea of an extended life-span, the less certain Drake was that he really wanted it. In spite of Tiny Tom's cynical reassurance, the unwilling celibate was only too keenly aware of his usual worth in feminine eyes. Did he really crave five hundred years of frustration, with an occasional respite in the form of another Ethel Gassner?

As Sunday slowly, inexorably passed, he grew increasingly nervous about his bet with the devil. Though his plans had seemed foolproof at first, the preposterous fiend had bested him twice, and he was still in jeopardy. Though he was positive the third task could not possibly bring him any grief, Drake was still anxious about it. His confidence had been severely shaken.

As the shadows lengthened, so did his fears. By nine o'clock, he had bitten his nails to the tips of his fingers. At ten, he started to feel queasy and thought he was being watched.

By eleven p.m., Drake hit upon a new third wish, one born of desperation. The wording, he decided, was positively brilliant.

But Tiny Tom did not agree.

"Don't ask me to accept that wish," he warned, shaking his head so hard that one of his plastic horns swung loose and dangled above his right eye.

"Why shouldn't I?" Drake challenged. "It really has you beat this time, *doesn't it?*" He was pretending an arrogance he did not feel.

"Look, boy, it's about time you realized these brilliant ideas of yours have a habit of backfiring."

"The wording stands," said Drake. "I wish that the contract between us be considered null and void *if* you perform my third task."

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It seemed perfect. If Tiny Tom figured out a way to perform the third task and still threaten the mortal, the new wish would neatly get him off the hook. And then he would still have all that wealth—

But Tiny Tom shook his head, and the horn fell off and dropped in his lap. "I'm warning you, boy, you're leaving a bad chink in your defenses."

"Such as?"

"Such as a sloppy implied meaning—and the law is rough on them. What happens if Hell loses?"

"Huh?"

"Look, you're asking to scrap the contract if I perform the third task. *What if I can't?"*

Drake swallowed hard.

"Your third wish implies that if I *couldn't* perform the final task, then I *could* take your soul. See the trap?"

Drake nodded miserably. "But why are you telling me this?"

"Because," Tom said, pawing the floor with a hoof in the attitude of a naughty schoolboy, "I like your style. You're my first threesie in years, and I don't want you to screw up on a technicality. You're giving the Boss a great run for his money."

"Well, then," Drake murmured gamely, "I'll guess I'll risk it after all. Put me down for the women."

"Attaboy!" Tiny Tom crowed, delighted. "That's *my* kinda wish!" He rubbed his paws together enthusiastically, which made the talons click. He pulled a cigar out of his pocket, lit it and waved it grandly at the mortal, inviting him to name the final task.

Drake cleared his throat.

"Tell his Infernal Majesty that he—that is, Satan, Lucifer, Dis, Beelzebub, Ahrimanes, Old Scratch, or whatever other diabolic nomenclature—"

"All right, all right, I *know* who you mean."

"Tell him he must offer up unqualified contrition for his boundless catalog of nefarious misdeeds and commend his soul to eternal reconciliation.

"In other words," Drake ordered, a triumphant grin spreading over his face, "I want your Boss to reform and apologize to God!"

TINY TOM said nothing for a long while. Then he rose slowly, withdrew the contract from his cape and tore the scroll to bits; then he tossed a phial full of green liquid to Drake.

"Drink it," he said. "It will make you irresistible." Without another word, Tiny Tom disappeared.

Dazed by his sudden success, Drake swallowed the bitter liquor and immediately picked up the phone and called Ethel Gassner. To his sur-

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prise and delight, she promised to come right over. He hung up and began to devise sexual punishments for the anguish she had caused him. Then, slumping onto his thread-bare sofa, he began to imagine carnal junkets to Hollywood, the Riviera, possibly Monaco . . .

"I'll make a list," he told himself. Then, with a satisfied smirk on his face, he fell asleep.

HE AWOKE facedown, naked, on a jagged rocky floor. His body was covered with sweat and he lay near a noxious pool of filth. When he tried to raise his head, a tidal wash of agony engulfed him. He moaned.

Painfully, Drake rolled slowly onto his back and opened his eyes. A dazzling crimson light blinded him, then he saw polished stone walls arched high above him and nearby, a lean hideous figure which strode forward and straddled him, one leg on either side of his body.

It was Tiny Tom—and yet it was not. Taller, thinner, more sinewy, the creature had a hairy body matted with perspiration and ordure. The comical scarlet tights and cape were missing, and in place of the rubber pitchfork was an axe clutched in one taloned claw. The haft and blade bore sinister stains.

The creature spoke.

"Welcome, *boy,*" said the fiend. "Welcome to Hell."

Drake screamed. "What am I doing here? I was asleep!"

"That's true, but you died while you slept," the demon explained. "Unfortunately, when you signed my contract, you rather drastically altered your probability span."

"But my wishes—"

"Are immaterial. You were so concerned with technicalities that you missed a transparent danger, one so apparent that I capered and postured and played the clown to keep your attention diverted."

"What are you talking about?" Drake shuddered, as he saw thousands of vermin running over the fiend's scabrous body.

"My friend," the other answered, "there are many roads to Hell, and you have chosen one of them. Bargaining with me is a dangerous practice. It is a grave affront to beneficent forces: by choosing to gamble with me, you automatically put yourself in jeopardy!"

"But I won!"

"Yes," the Devil sardonically replied, " and *what* did you win? Vast wealth? That might not have mattered, no more than a preternaturally extended life would have—not if you had put them to good use. But *you* selected irresistibility,—much to my intense delight! It is a wish that depends for its fulfillment on the subversion of free spirits. One doesn't get into Hell by accident; one earns it!"

"No!" Drake protested, trying to rise, but the Devil pushed him down with a cloven hoof. "This is *not* fair! Our contract—"

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"Is null and void. When you make deals with me, betting and bargaining for the opportunity to warp other flesh to your will, it makes no difference whether you best me in three bets or three thousand. By common law, as it were, you have sold your soul to Hell!"

Drake groaned and tried to escape. But the Devil lifted him upon his back and bore him to the brink of the abyss. Satan hurled the mortal into the gaping chasm, and as he fell, Drake scanned the awful panorama of the Pit.

It resembled a Medieval woodcut.

Bio-Sketch

Marvin Kaye

Born in Philadelphia, Pa. Studied theatre and English lit. in college (Penn State), came to New York in the '60s to act, direct and write plays. Became diverted into trade journalism and newspaper work. In 1970, began as fulltime freelance, writing mystery novels and nonfiction books.

Have collected fantasy literature since my teens, began seriously to write SF and fantasy several years ago. First efforts were to pb anthologies in 1975: *Fiends and Creatures* and *Brother Theodore's Chamber of Horrors.*

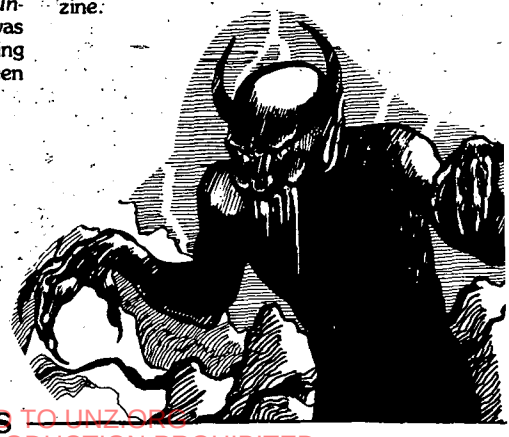
Since then have written *The Masters of Solitude* (with Parke Godwin) and *The Incredible Umbrella,* the latter of which was serialized in *Fantastic,* and is forthcoming in a Dell paper edition in 1980, having been published in hardcovers by Doubleday.

Currently writing sequels to "umbrella" and "masters" and will see a short story collection of fantasy from Doubleday.

Other books include (mysteries) *Bullets for MacBeth; My Son, The Druggist,* etc. (non-fiction) *A Toy is Born; The Handbook of Mental Magic,* etc.

Currently write a review column for *Galileo* magazine and an essay column on immortalism for *Long Life* magazine.

Member of, and co-founder of *The Open Book,* a New York readers theatre ensemble which is about to produce a series of radio dramas for *Galileo* magazine.



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FANTASTIC FACTS

Weather Report: Chicago 2000

by Thomas A. Easton

"Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it."

That's what the man said, and I have to go along with him. I can't do anything about the weather. I can't give you a sunny day for the picnic or a shower to wet down your lawn. I can't even tell you when the sun will shine or the rain will fall. I'm no weatherman. But I can tell you a little bit about what's in the wind. I can talk about the changes that seem to be coming in our climate, in what our weather averages out to be over the course of a year or more.

At present, Chicago's climate is pleasant. It has its hot spells and its cold spells, but few of its summer days are as stifling as those in Washington or Texas and even fewer of its winter days are as arctic as those in Anchorage or Bangor. We enjoy a very temperate and livable round of seasons.

But it won't last, except for the short term. Certainly not for the long term, and probably not for the middle term. The world and its weather change with the eons, with the movement of continents, the shifting of the poles, and the vagaries of the sun and our orbit around it, as well as with more transient events. And those scientists who study the atmosphere and other factors behind the weather all agree that we are due for a change before too long. They don't, however, agree on just what kind of a change it will be. Some say the world is warming up. Others say it is cooling down. Some believe all the carbon dioxide we release into the air by burning fossil fuels for heat and power and transportation produces a "greenhouse effect" — it prevents heat from escaping from the Earth into space — which might eventually roast us all. Others believe the particles of soot and dust we put into the air by burning fuels and by exposing agricultural soil to the wind reflect sunlight and keep the Earth from receiving enough heat to keep its temperature up where it belongs.

Who is right? It's hard to say at this point, but one thing is clear. Studies of historical records show that climate does indeed change and that it can change drastically within only a few years. For instance, the seventy years between 1645 and 1715 saw the coldest part of the "Little Ice Age" that had earlier forced the Norsemen to abandon their Greenland settlements. The cold came on quickly, and it coincided with an even more sudden virtual absence of sunspots. Together with other associations between sunspot cycles and the weather (and planetary configurations), this event has prompted many scientists to wonder about cosmic causes for our weather. They speculate that astrology, like many another piece of legend or error, may conceal a core of truth.

A more extreme example comes from the early nineteenth century, when a south Pacific volcano exploded and threw the whole planet into shadow. It threw such enormous quantities of dust into the air that much of the sun's heat never reached the Earth, and England's growing season was shortened so much that crops failed and people starved.

More recently, the weather scientists have been looking at average tempera-

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tures, and some of them think the weight of the evidence points to a cooling of the planet. The records show that even though the northern hemisphere seemed to warm up by about half a degree Centigrade between 1880 and 1940, it has cooled by about a third of a degree just between 1940 and 1970. This drop may not seem like much, but it has happened quickly and it may be enough to explain the satellite photos which suggest that Arctic snow cover is becoming more extensive and lasting longer into the summer. A very slight cooling can have a large effect on how long ice and snow last, especially where the summer temperature never gets much warmer than freezing, and because ice and snow reflect heat away from the Earth, that effect can "snowball." A small drop in the planet's average temperature can produce a much larger drop.

The reasons for the cooling are not yet understood. They may have something to do with sunspots or other cosmic factors we cannot control. But they may also have something to do with the effects of our industrial civilization. The amounts of soot and dust in the air have been increasing for decades, especially in the industrialized northern hemisphere of the globe, and even though pollution controls may be reducing them now, they may have established their pattern. They reflect heat, which cools the Earth, so Arctic snow lasts longer and reflects more heat, and a cycle has begun. The cycle could culminate in an ice age, glaciers and all, but that is a long-term threat. In the short term, we are likely to see changes in the world's weather patterns. It has even been suggested that the droughts that have recently plagued the Midwest, Europe, Africa, and other areas are the first signs of such changes.

Other weather scientists think the "greenhouse effect" is far more important and that the cooling trend is only a temporary fluke. They point to a warming trend in the less industrialized southern hemisphere, and they blame it on all the carbon dioxide we have been pouring into the air. This may, however, be no less a fluke. The "greenhouse effect" is limited by the fact that carbon dioxide is promptly absorbed by green plants and turned into vegetable matter than can be burned as food and fuel. It is recycled indefinitely. Soot and dust may eventually settle out of the air, but they may stay aloft much longer than carbon dioxide.

We thus may not be able to know just how the climate is going to change, but we do know the change is coming. The change is not likely to be so severe that our children will roast or freeze, but it will affect our lives. It may be heat, cold, drought, or even storm, and we should be warned so that we are not unready to meet them. We should not, however, forget that scientists could be wrong. The world's climate could well continue on as it has for many years, each year being a little different from the one before, but with no trend toward heat or cold.

If the climate does change, what will the effects be? Predictions are never easy to make with any certainty, and this is the more true when the predictions we want depend on still others. We must recognize that the effects of climate change on our lives will depend on the direction of the change, and we must be aware that our predictions of these effects will be very iffy. But let's get down to cases, taking the ifs in order.

If the climate becomes much warmer than it is today, we can expect to see warmer summers and milder winters. We will use less energy for heat in winter and more for air conditioning in summer, with the net result being a saving in fuel. We will have a longer growing season, and if the extra heat doesn't also mean less rain we should see lower food prices. On the negative side, we will see more cars with air conditioning, and this will make the average car a more expensive machine with lower mileage and restricted performance. The dust that accompanies hot weather will find its way into engines and produce wear and maintenance problems. Pavement will expand and crack more during the summer, so that the roads will become rougher and more costly to maintain. And the highways will become more crowded as people seek more often to escape the city.

A colder climate will mean colder winters and shorter summers. It will mean a shorter growing season and higher food

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prices, and because overall more fuel will be used for heating purposes than will be saved by the decreased need for air conditioning, the cost of gasoline and other fuels will go up. Auto insurance premiums will go through the roof (they're only bulging it now) because more driving will be on snow and ice and because accidents are more likely on that slippery stuff. Cars will suffer lower mileage because they will carry the extra weight of the insulation added against the cold. And road conditions will be far worse than they are today because of an increase in the number of frost heaves and pot holes (even in Chicago, which would seem to have more than enough already). The only advantage of a colder climate may be that the roads will not be too crowded, since more folks will be staying home.

Drought can accompany either a cooling or a warming climate, depending on how the temperature changes affect the rainfall patterns. Its effects can therefore be added to those of either change in the climate, and these effects are more likely to be economic than anything else. First and foremost, drought hurts the food supply and drives up prices. It can cause unemployment and depression, not to mention famine, and it can severely cramp the supply of money for leisure activities. It can also mean cutbacks in government programs, from highway maintenance to social welfare to scientific research and education (but hardly to defense).

You may think I'm not painting a very pretty picture, but it could be worse. The effects of heat, cold, and drought are all relatively minor. They are annoyances not much worse than many of the annoyances we live with today. The picture becomes truly dire only when we turn aside from the simple and straightforward projections of heat or cold. As I said a few paragraphs ago, there is some evidence that the northern hemisphere is cooling while the southern is warming. And if this is the pattern of the future — which it may be, since nature is usually more complex than we are willing to believe — we may be in for it. America, Europe, and Asia will suffer the cold. Australia, Africa, and South America will endure the heat. And everyone will be buffeted by storm.

It is small temperature differences over large distances that whip up hurricanes, typhoons, and other big storms. If these differences are exaggerated, then we may expect to see more storms, more washed out bridges and roads, more flooded streets and viaducts, and more shoreline erosion. It could even reach the point where Lake Michigan reclaims all the bed we have robbed it of with our landfill operations, and more. Picture it: automobiles and smokestacks have poured carbon dioxide, soot, and dust into the air, and these pollutants, by changing the climate, may one day bring the towers of the Loop crashing into the surf. We could halt the process by lowering the level of the lake, but what would that do to our sanitation arrangements? To shipping?

What can we do about it? Not much. We're pretty helpless when it comes to the weather, after all, and so far weather control remains a pipe dream. We can try to cut down on the soot and dust we put into the air, and thus hope to keep the world from cooling off, but we cannot stop producing carbon dioxide. Our civilization must burn fuel to survive, and the world must therefore warm up at least a little.

But it's not that simple. I don't really believe we'll do a very good job of eliminating the soot and dust. We'll cut it down, but a little will remain, and that little will increase as we continue to increase our population. Its effect may come more slowly, but it will come. The north will continue to cool while the south continues to warm, and we'll have the storms. We may begin to feel them by the end of the century — have the weather reports seemed ominous in the last few years? — And the best we can do may be to move inland.

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Illustrated by Elinor Mavor

Don't judge a writer by his cover

CREATOR OF TOMORROW

by Dave Stover

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IT WAS the largest science fiction convention ever held, and I'd convinced the city editor I should be the one to cover it. Of course, my motives were not purely journalistic: I've been a fan for years (decades, even), and now an opportunity to attend a con, all expenses paid . . .

Saturday. I was in the crowded ballroom of the Royal Hotel, searching for Mortimer Crane. I had already met and talked with Asimov, Heinlein, Pohl and others for my series, "Creators of Tomorrow," and Crane was supposed to be in the ballroom, somewhere . . .

At last I caught sight of him, surrounded by a crowd, talking and joking in his customary gentle manner. Crane didn't look like a writer of science fiction: he was elderly, white-haired, reticent, overly courteous; the perfect grandfather to spend a summer's day fishing with, but hardly the sort of man one would consider to be a top-notch sf author.

I managed to push through the throng of people around him, using my carefully cultivated (twenty-five years it had taken to perfect) air of reportorial authority and soon I had him to myself.

"Paul Henderson, from the *Star*," I said as we shook hands. "We're running a series on the 'Creators of Tomorrow,' the leading sf writers, and I wondered if the two of us could talk—"

"Of course," he agreed in a soft voice, "though I hardly consider myself a leader in the field."

I smiled. Coming from anyone else whose books had sold millions of copies, the remark would have seemed blatantly insincere; from Crane it was only genuine modesty.

"Let's argue that point over something to drink," I suggested. A few minutes later found us in the hotel's lounge, still relatively empty at this time in the afternoon.

"Now, then, Mr. Crane," I began, as a waiter brought us the drinks (myself a beer—Crane a ginger ale, he having refused the offer of alcohol), "you are acclaimed as an author in the field for one major reason: your ability to make alien beings come to life, and yet not make them overly human. How do you do it? How do you make a being from the third planet of Tau Ceti at once totally unlike us and at the same time a sympathetic character?"

"Mr. Henderson," he replied, running one hand through his thinning hair, adjusting his spectacles, "I can't tell you how many times I've been

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asked questions of that sort. 'You must be an extremely imaginative man,' the interviewers say, and I answer, 'No, I'm not!' In fact, I often have the hardest time coming up with believable locations or spacecraft; anymore I let my next-door neighbor figure those things out for me." A chuckle. "He gets a cut of the royalties, naturally, and he's a heckuva lot better at those details than I ever could be."

I nodded, urging him on.

"Others have wondered if, before I started writing, I travelled the world greatly, or owned a business, so that I came to know a great many people. They assume, I suppose, that knowing much of human beings would help one in writing of non-humans, though I cannot say if that is true. In any case, I have always been a writer, and have not such an extremely wide range of human experience as you, for example, being a reporter, would have."

"How then do you account for the fact that you create the most believable aliens in science fiction?"

"Well," he smiled, "we all have our trade secrets, don't we? I might ask *you* how you have managed to obtain the government connections that make your political column for the *Star* so devastating at times, right? And would you tell me?"

"You've got me there," I admitted, gazing down into the amber depths of my drink. "But still, you have a remarkable gift—"

Looking up, I stopped in mid-sentence, astounded. Across from me no longer was Mortimer Crane, white-haired grandpa, but something—else. Bipedal, yes, but with two arms ending in tentacles of sorts, covered in a golden fuzz, head with three eyes, a slit-like mouth, no ears—

And then Crane was back, pushing his glasses up onto his nose, genial as ever. Around us the sounds of everyday life went on. "Now you know, Mr. Henderson."

He rose from the table. "Sorry to leave so soon, but there's a banquet tonight I must attend. Perhaps I'll even win an award. I trust you'll be there. And thank you for the drink and our most enjoyable little chat."

Then he handed me a book, his latest hardcover. "A gift," he said amiably. "One of my best."

And then he was gone.

I opened the cover of the book; it was signed, simply, "Mortimer Crane."

The waiter returned with the check, and around me the lounge grew ever noisier, the clatter of dishes and cutlery, people talking and laughing,—but still I sat there, staring . . . ●

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Bio-Sketch

Dave Stover

Well, it happened sooner than I ever thought it would. After reading somewhere that John Creasey received 10,000 rejection slips before selling his first story, I was a bit worried about my chances. (I rather doubt my patience, self-confidence and supply of International Reply Coupons could have lasted for twenty or thirty rejections in a row, much less 10,000. Perhaps the story is apocryphal . . .) But here I am, two months after first submitting, with an acceptance. I'm surprised—and very, very pleased.

What has especially pleased me is the amount of encouragement I've gotten from editors. Isaac Asimov's stories about John Campbell have always made me wonder whether I would get the same sort of treatment, or were most editors quite the opposite of friendly, inspiring and encouraging? Well, so far I've been lucky—a note and writer's guidelines from George Scithers, a "We're interested" reply to a query on a nonfiction item (that one's still pending), and the communication with you. It's nice to feel that out there people do care about beginning writers, enough to take time from their other responsibilities to write notes, criticize constructively, etc. Thanks.

Biographical sketch (in addition to what has gone above):

I was born in Tillsonburg, Ontario, a town of about 9,000, 100-miles southwest of Toronto (halfway between Toronto and Detroit). Have lived here all my life; at present my education is continuing. I've been interested in science fiction since I was nine or ten, have since been cultivating a collection which threatens to push me out onto the streets. Favorite authors: Asimov and Clarke. (Someday I would like the opportunity to meet both.) Other interests: food, drink, sleep, sex (any order you please). Ambitions: to continue writing and (I hope) be published. I have not yet begun work on my memoirs...

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A BRAND NEW FULL-LENGTH FANTASY NOVEL
Part I in This Issue

The White Isle

DARRELL SCHWEITZER

"...he could feel the presence of the demon ...it pressed against him from all sides, hate-filled, furious."

from "The White Isle," illustrated by Gary Freeman

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